

The **BLACK OFFICE**

AND OTHER CHAPTERS OF ROMANCE

Agnes & Egerton Castle

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MURRAY'S SHILLING NOVELS

MICHAEL O'HALLORAN

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THE BLACK OFFICE

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582

BY AGNES AND EGERTON CASTLE

ROSE OF THE WORLD
THE SECRET ORCHARD
IF YOUTH BUT KNEW
WROTH
THE STAR DREAMER
PANTHER'S CUB
DIAMOND CUT PASTE
THE LOST IPHIGENIA
LOVE GILDS THE SCENE
THE BATH COMEDY
INCOMPARABLE BELLAIRS
FRENCH NAN
MY MERRY ROCKHURST
THE PRIDE OF JENNICO
FLOWER O' THE ORANGE
THE GOLDEN BARRIER
CHANCE THE PIPER
THE GRIP OF LIFE
THE WAYS OF MISS BARBARA
OUR SENTIMENTAL GARDEN
FORLORN ADVENTURERS
COUNT RAVEN
THE HOPE OF THE HOUSE
A LITTLE HOUSE IN WAR TIME
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MARSHFIELD THE OBSERVER
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SCHOOLS AND MASTERS OF FENCE
ENGLISH BOOK-PLATES
THE JERNINGHAM LETTERS
LE ROMAN DU PRINCE OTHON

THE BLACK OFFICE

AND OTHER CHAPTERS
OF ROMANCE

By AGNES AND EGERTON CASTLE

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.1

1917

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FOREWORD

STORY-tellers are apt to become enamoured for a spell with the atmosphere of a special period ; with its manners and the style of adventure such manners rendered possible.—In most of the chapters which make up this volume, events move in much the same period : *l'époque Romantique*, as it is still called in France, the decade or two which followed the great Anglo-French peace, a hundred years ago. The characters and incidents are almost as much Gallic as British ; for friendly intercourse was then being resumed between countries too long estranged.

Those were days that our grandfathers have known ; still sufficiently near to enable us to appreciate their ways of life from but slightly changed points of view, yet already invested by distance with an essentially romantic colour. They were still the days of the duel, of " bucks," of coach and sail, and all the experiences that slow and difficult communications brought into social intercourse.

The " Black Office "—the *Cabinet Noir*—was a vile institution, first devised for secret government purposes by the *Grand Monarque*, only wiped out, just before the revolution of

1830, to the intense relief of the country, as a blot on its fair fame. We may trust that there is nought in common (beyond the opening of private letters) between it and the censorship of foreign correspondence which our present times of stress have rendered necessary. But there is some interest in the comparison of the then and the now.

The same may be said of the prohibition of all gold export from these shores: though, in this case, the contrast is all in favour of the men that were. Gold smuggling, as it is now carried out—on the whole in but lame and impotent manner—is treachery pure and simple; a device of the enemy within our gates. But no reproach, apparently, attached to the guinea-runner, at the call of the restored Bourbons, greater than to the venturer in any other kind of free-trading. Such at least was the personal conviction of the captains, in the two episodes, “The Red Kilns of Amblemont” and “The Belts of Gold,” concerning the morality of their enterprises.

The *idée-mère* of “The Smile in the Portrait” could be traced perhaps to certain lines in one of Browning’s Dramatic Romances, “My last Duchess”:

. . . Sir, ’twas not
Her husband’s presence only called that spot
Of joy in the duchess’s cheek . . .

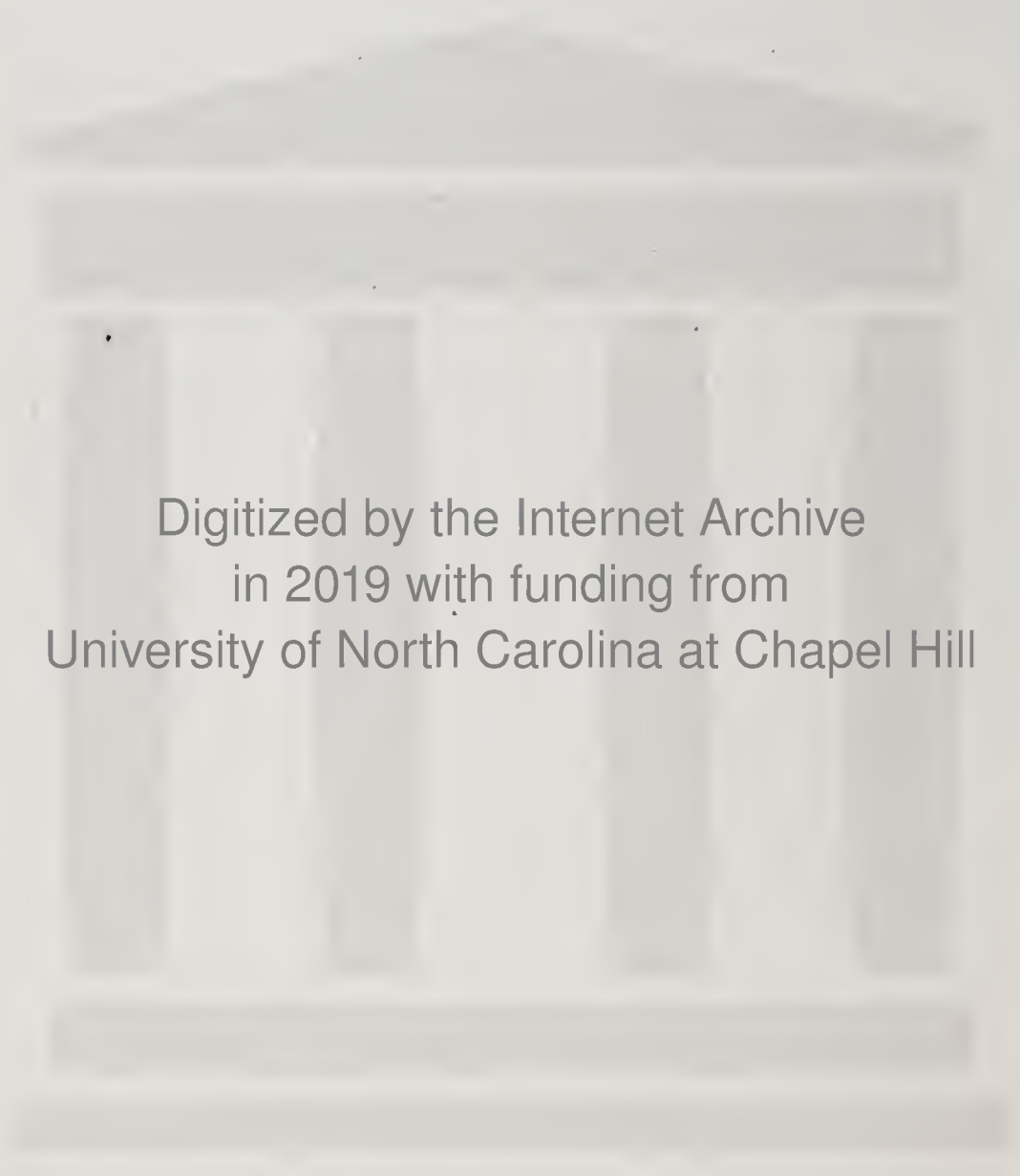
The lines, it is true, would have been apposite as the epigraph without which no *nouvelle* of the romantic epoch was considered complete. But the story of Champernon’s child-wife was more directly evolved from the haunting of a singular phrase:

. . . *J’ai tué le sourire!* . . .

which leaped out of the page of a certain romance typical of the style dear to eighteen thirty—a time when the reader was willingly led into tracts of sinister scenery through which human passions, above all that of jealousy, strode wrapt in dark mantles, plotting tragedy.

The story of "The Resurrectionist," and that of "The Arresting Point" (which latter takes us something like a century further back), although portraying Edinburgh characters so widely different in colour and attitude as the villain Burke and that great gentleman, that lovable "fanatic of a blade," Sir William Hope, of Balcomie, yet had, at their first suggestion, one thing in common—and that is the irresistible romantic lure of the old Town, whether found in the chambers of the Castle or in those of those ancient "lands" now fallen into squalor from their former high estate.

April 1917.



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I
THE BLACK OFFICE

I

THE ENGLISH MAIL-BAG OF SEPTEMBER 3RD

MYSTERY hung about the mean, narrow-fronted house which formed the angle between the Rue Coq-Héron and the Rue Verdelet in the heart of old Paris. Not the longest memory in the neighbourhood could recall it tenanted—indeed, its single vertical row of windows might have been blind from the beginning, so thick was the accumulated grime on their panes. Dilapidated, deserted, crumbling to decay as the place was, it, nevertheless, boasted a door in solid repair, with a lock of undeniable, not to say impregnable, quality—as, indeed, had been more than once ascertained.

Rumour had it that people let themselves in and out through that strongly barred door under the cover of darkness, and with every secret precaution. Some, with greater particularity, averred that five individuals—never more and never less—entered and left the abandoned house on most nights of the year ; and an impression had gained ground that the less said and the less meddled with the more wholesome it would be for everyone concerned. It was a miserable and unsavoury quarter, and the towering proximity of La Grande Poste only served to throw the general squalor into stronger relief.

Among the community which here dwelt, a

reputation of secret and nefarious designs, such as might well have been associated with the corner house, was not one likely to provoke surprise or fear. But a theory had sprung into existence that the secret police were in some way at the bottom of the business; and the mere suspicion was enough, even in these placid days of restored Royalty, to render the mysterious haunt more to be avoided by the most daring rascalion of the district than if it had been a centre of plague and death.

On the night of September 3rd, 1815, the strokes of ten were pouring, low and deep-toned, from the clock of St. Eustache, when Sylvestre Cabarus turned from the south end into the darkness of Rue Coq-Héron, and made his way at an even pace towards the corner house.

He paused a moment to look about him before inserting the key into the discreet keyhole. The door, in deep shadow, beyond reach of the nearest swinging oil-lamp—a miserable enough luminary even at close quarters—opened noiselessly, and noiselessly closed upon him. He reached to the left, found with assured touch flint and matches, lit a candle, and, after selecting another key from the bundle he had drawn by its chain from his buckskins pocket, leisurely ascended the dusty wooden stairs.

At the second flight he passed into an inner room. It had a boarded window, which explained the musty, almost suffocating atmosphere, and was perfectly bare except for a large wooden press in a corner. This he unlocked, and, stooping slightly, entered, and shut himself in; then feeling for a catch in the back boards of the sham piece of furniture, pushed the panel aside and passed through.

And now he found himself in a short passage,

at one end of which was a muffled glass window, and at the other a single narrow door. Selecting yet another key, he inserted it in the lock, placed his candlestick beside four others which stood in a row on a ledge, blew out his light and opened the door. It swung noiselessly, as had those other two through which he had passed, and as it fell with a scarcely perceptible click into the lock behind him, it presented on the inside the singular appearance—not of a door at all, but of an iron safe.

It was a very large room, with high but jealously shuttered windows, furnished with cushioned, high-back chairs and a half score of massive tables. Some of these were laden with mail-bags that either still awaited investigation or stood ready sealed for dispatch. Others revealed, under the brilliant light of reflector-lamps, an incredible array of cutting and mending, sealing and stamping implements, steaming kettles, and every imaginable material for epistolary desecration and counterfeit.

At these were seated four gentlemen, so busily engaged upon their work that only a watchful, uplifted glance from each greeted the entrance of the fifth.

Sylvestre Cabarus saluted the company with a slight, courteous gesture, divested himself calmly of his high-crowned beaver and his bottle-green *houppelande*; then inspected the post-bags, and selecting the one marked "Calais," transferred it to the vacant working table. He sat down, and, after piling up on his left a hundred or so of epistles destined to cross the Channel by the next packet, settled down with the quiet expedition of long practice to investigate the addresses and make his selection.

Except for the slow tick of the clock over the fireplace, the occasional clearing of a throat, the scratch of pens, the rustling of sheets, ever and anon the rising of someone in search of fresh material or some special tool, quiet reigned in the room : each one intent only on his own task.

Some dozen letters had passed through the fingers of the Baron Cabarus, a few being set aside for closer investigation, when suddenly the attentive yet detached look of the scrutator's face changed. A deeper stillness seemed to fall upon him ; he sat staring at the superscription of a letter which he held under the lamp.

The writing was neat, unmistakably feminine. He turned the folded sheet over and scanned the seal, which displayed a noble coat-of-arms set within the lozenge ; this alone, even without the betraying scent of the paper, would have proclaimed the sex of the writer. Then he read the direction once more :

MISTRESS MATILDE CHALFONT
(née Comtesse de la Motte-Herbault),
Orange House,
Datchet, near Windsor,
Angleterre.

He remained lost in a muse.

Here was a letter which, but for the circumstance revealed by the aristocratic parenthesis, he might well have passed over. The unknown Mistress Chalfont was not on the list of persons in which his chief, Fouché, Duc.d'Otrante, the great Minister of Police, took an interest. But to the Baron Cabarus the name of La Motte-Herbault held an intimate significance. With a long-drawn breath, he came out of his abstrac-

tion and placed the letter apart. Then, with a loyal self-restraint, he gave himself to the pursuance of his duty.

The work, which filled several hours, was irreproachably accomplished ; the seal cutting, the unwafering and re-sealing was, as usual, performed with a skill that defied detection ; methodical as ever was the copying and docketing of information. At last he was free to turn his attention to the perfumed letter with the patrician stamp of elegance.

He spread it open to perusal under the lamp-light ; and therein he found matter which, if of no importance to the powers that were, held, as he had anticipated, absorbing interest for their confidential servant, Sylvestre Cabarus.

“ MY DEAR FRIEND—(so ran the document, which was dated from Orleans, September 1st)—How many years have passed since I had the joy of seeing you in our exile ? So many things happen in these days, one almost loses count of time ! All the great events in our world you must, of course, know, even in your distant country retreat—the rapidity with which the old rightful order is being re-established in our beloved France after its long trials and martyrdom ; and how the crimes of the revolutionary savages and of the Corsican usurper are being punished, and how, as far as possible, their ravages are being repaired. But—and this, besides the wish to hear again from you, is the reason of my writing—there are greater things still to come—the complete reinstatement not only of the Church, but of all the old Noblesse, to its ordained position. At last ! At last !

“ Now, La Motte-Herbault happened to be talked of in a réunion at which we were present,

Chambron and I, last night, and your name, dear Matilde, being mentioned, I was seized with the desire to be the first with the good news.

“ Yes, it is absolutely certain that fresh powers are to be exercised to restore to their **rightful** owners, whenever they can be discovered, all the old estates confiscated by the rebels. This act of justice, as probably you know, was one of the clauses of the charter which our good King granted the country on his first return from exile. It was not, however, found possible then to carry a plan so righteous to full execution. By some monstrous quibble in the name of equity, law, and similar crimes—all the poison of the revolutionary ideas had not yet been killed—they declared that people, even Jacobins, who had purchased our confiscated property from the State, could not now be turned out ! The State ! Can one conceive such a thing ! State indeed—their Convention of *sans-culottes* a State ! Their Directoire, their Corsican bandit ! It makes one’s blood boil. Our king was too good.

“ But now that the terrible hydra is finally crushed better counsels prevail. The rabblement, one hears, is being paid back in its own coin of shooting and guillotining, God be praised ! And Chambron knows for a certainty that a new law is about to pass which will enable us all to recover possession of our old estates, whether ‘ purchased ’ or not, merely on proving our names and descent. How it will be carried out, I do not pretend to understand ; but Chambron is already much engaged in collecting our proofs. And we are all, as you may imagine, in great joy. Now, dear Matilde, there is no time to lose. Your son—that handsome child I recollect—must be a full-grown man by now.

Although he bears an English name, he remains the grandson and only descendant of the Comte de la Motte-Herbault, your noble father, does he not? Send him at once over to France. Let him bring every parchment and paper that can be of use, and let him take such measures as he may to secure restitution of your patrimony. Why, better still, send him over to us. Chambron and I will indeed welcome him. He shall be well piloted, well introduced. Chalfont is no doubt a good name, but you will be the last to dispute that La Motte-Herbault is a better. We shall then look forward to seeing you reigning in the old château instead of that ex-Jacobin, ex-Bonapartist—and, let us hope, ex-proprietor—Cabarus. Baron Cabarus, if you please! Baron Carmagnole, Baron Bonnet-Rouge! *Fi donc!*

“ I trust this letter will find you still in health and happiness—oh, how I have always envied that happiness of yours in a fine son, I who have none!—and that it may induce you to return ere long from your adopted fogland to our own fair Touraine.

“ Your well-affectioned friend,

“ ADELAIDE DE CHAMBRON.”

Sylvestre Cabarus read with profound attention and unmoved countenance. Dropping the letter upon the table, he became lost in reverie.

The spell was only broken by the rising of the last of the scrutators, preparatory to departure. One by one the others, their task completed, had left the room.

“ Good-night, M. le Baron,” said the individual respectfully from the threshold of the sham safe-door. “ We have all done before you, for once.”

"Ah, good-night—or, rather, good-day, M. Dutailly," came the answer, in a pleasant voice. "Three o'clock, I see. It is later than I thought. Well, good-day to you. I have not done yet."

Left alone in the complete silence, he took up the letter again, and mechanically reached his hand for a sheet of copying paper. But, upon a change of mind, he rose and meditatively paced the room, pausing at last before his table to gaze a moment longer at the open sheet. Apparently, the chief censor of M. Fouché's *Cabinet Noir* had decided that here was a document in regard to which the ordinary procedure was not sufficient. Instead of copying and re-sealing it, he folded it up deliberately and consigned it to his pocket-book.

Having returned the English mail—minus this personally interesting missive—to the post-bag, which he closed, sealed, and carried to the adjacent room where the mails were waiting for collection in the morning, he locked the door of communication, donned his coat, extinguished the lamps, and let himself out in the same manner as he had entered.

He glanced up at the sky. It was stormy, but the wind was mild. In spite of the length of his vigil and the proximity of a cab-rank, where he was wont on unpropitious weather to hire a fiacre, he determined to walk home. In meditative mood, vexed with puzzling thoughts, he was, nevertheless, from old habit, careful to keep the middle of the deserted streets, and, though fully trusting in the companionship of his sword-stick, to have a wary eye for every dark entry along his way.

The faint rays of a low dawn were streaking with pearl-greys and yellows the waters of the

Seine as he crossed the Pont Marie, at the corner of which, on the island side, rose, black against the already fading diaper of stars, the patrician mansion of Pimodan—whilom of Lauzun—of which the Baron Cabarus occupied the principal storey. Looking up, he could note, between imperfectly closed curtains, a discreet light which proclaimed that the well-warmed room and prepared suppertable were ready against his return at any hour.

None of the usual police regulations, nor the customs of great houses, could bind Sylvestre Cabarus upon any point where the convenience of his office was at stake. He came and went under his own roof as secretly as in the grimy corner house near La Grande Poste. No concierge had the counting of his movements ; and to-night, as was his custom, his private key admitted him through the back door, up the service stair, into the silent, slumberful house. Thus it was that he reached his dining-room, where he sat down uninterestedly to his meal.

A powerful man, sanguine, and a total stranger to nerves, he would, as a rule, eat copiously and with relish at the most undue hour of the night ; but he was, just then, in that irritating mood known as being of two minds.

After trifling absently with the carving-knife, while still pursuing the inner debate, he pushed away the tempting array of viands and fruit and took up the coffee that was fragrantly simmering amid the ashes of the wood fire. Presently, sipping at his cup, his hard grey eyes fixed on the lamp-flame but lost in distant speculation, he was aware of soft footsteps on the carpet, of a silken rustle ; and, turning round slowly, he saw his wife enter the room. He was not surprised, for she would often, if she hap-

pened to be awake, get up to welcome her man after his labours.

With a quilted-silk wrapper over her night-gear ; with a coquettish lace cap that a marquise of the old régime would not have disavowed covering the heavy plaits of her black hair, the Baronne Cabarus, in her ripe forties, was as pleasing and handsome a woman as any man could wish to find under his roof. Twenty years before, in the days of her blossoming youth, when he had taken her with simple Republican rites before the altar of Reason and Liberty, the black-eyed, peach-cheeked Citoyenne Cabarus had been a by-word for beauty even at Arles, that nest of beautiful women. They had, of course, been properly remarried later, when times of order and social decorum had returned. Both she and her husband, who were of a certainty not ordinary people, had moved with their times and steadily taken unto themselves the polish of prosperity. They had rapidly effaced the plebeian, even the bourgeois, stamp in manners and speech. As for appearance, taking them as a couple, they were perhaps the best-looking pair in Paris ; and, in circles at least where pedigrees were not a matter of main interest, the Baron and Baronne Cabarus were not only admired, but welcome personalities.

But, what is of greater importance in life, after twenty years' association in a struggling world, they were still as welcome and as admirable as ever in each other's eyes.

Madame Cabarus kissed her husband on the temple, then, noticing the untouched meal, she questioned him with a look, and came round the table to sit down in front of him. A relaxation had come into his face for a moment on

her entrance, but now his countenance was grave again.

"What is it, Sylvestre?" she asked in a quiet voice, after a while. "No appetite? Has anything annoyed you?"

"The same thing—only nearer this time."

"Ah, my poor friend, not that restitution law again?"

He fingered his pocket-book, still hesitating. After a pause he threw the letter on the table before her.

"You may as well know at once, Estelle," he said. "Read this."

She glanced at him anxiously, and unfolded the sheet. When she came to the end of her perusal she looked up in silence.

"What do you make of it?" he asked.

"Then it is true," she said, following her own thoughts: "they are going on with the decree?"

"Oh, the decree will pass, sure enough, now. I had it from Fouché himself. He thinks it is a great mistake, but it is coming."

"I did not believe it," she said musingly. "At any rate, I did not believe it would touch us."

"Neither did I. But only because I was sure there were none of the Motte-Herbault left. The son guillotined at Strasbourg, the father killed at Quiberon. The daughter never heard more of after the Lille affair. There was, of course, some danger from possible collaterals that might be neglected. But now——"

"Now," said his wife, quick to follow, "the daughter reappears again. Well?"

"Acknowledged, you see, by such people as the Chambrons, white-hot Court people. And if by them, no doubt by others."

They were looking into each other's eyes gravely, their thoughts and deductions attuned.

"And there is a son," she added. Then, glancing down again, her finger on the address : "Mistress Chalfont, married to an Englishman. That is what became of her. The son, of course, is an Englishman, kept away from France in all the war days. But now——"

"Even now," put in Sylvestre Cabarus, "he would probably visit France only as an English traveller—the place is full of them—but for such a summons as this letter conveys."

Madame had a smile.

"A letter," she said, "that might possibly never reach him."

"Which will probably—I don't know yet—not reach him. But the news of what is being done by that imbecile king of ours, who will lose his place again if he is not better advised"—this was said without heat: the Baron Cabarus was of those men who always view a situation from the practical standpoint—"the news is bound to reach him sooner or later. And then you know——"

A cloud of anxiousness fell over the woman. She leaned forward, a frown on her brow, a droop at the corners of her mouth.

"You really think, then, there is danger? After these twenty years—twenty years of possession, twenty years of work? Our fortune and our Marianne's!"

"Yes, and our Marianne's." There came a shadow of bitterness on his face, promptly repressed. "Something, you see, has to be done."

"Can anything be done?"

"Something can always be done"—he had a grim smile—"when enough hangs by it."

“ But what ? ”

“ I do not yet know, except that I must be first with those people. I shall then know what to do. Yes, I have decided.”

She gazed at him a little fearfully.

“ I must be first,” he repeated, getting up. “ I could not make up my mind whether I would let the letter go on by the next packet or suppress it. That was what was disturbing me. There is, as I said just now, a chance of the information reaching this Mistress Chalfont from some other quarter ; but that is not very likely—at least, just at present. And it will matter little, besides, if I am there first. I suppress the letter.” He reached for the sheet and refolded it. “ Meanwhile, to-morrow I apply for leave on urgent private affairs—Fouché knows better than to object. I arrange for the work to be done at the bureau, I get my passport and credentials, and in three days’ time I am in England. Then I will see to things. You know me.”

She had risen also.

“ Be careful, Sylvestre,” she said, in a low voice as if pursuing some thought that had no words but was terrifying to her. “ Think of her—Marianne.”

“ Be sure, my girl, that I will be careful of one thing ”—he pointed to the name on the superscription—“ and that is—no Mistress Chalfont, for all she may be a De la Motte-Herbault, shall rob our Marianne of her well-built fortune. Nor you, Estelle. And, *parbleu*, not myself. Have you ever known me fail ? ”

He took to pacing the long room pensively.

“ They say,” he went on, after a while, “ that everything comes to him who can wait. Maybe. I myself have always held it, like Fouché, that

everything succeeds to him who starts in time. Have I failed? Thermidor, Dix-huit Brumaire, the Hundred Days. . . . Like Fouché; I held on whilst the others sank. That came of starting in time. No, no—here also I am in time. We shall hold on. Faith, I think I am hungry, after all.”

So saying, Sylvestre Cabarus returned the letter to his pocket and sat down again, whilst his wife, though still with a face of doubt, carved for him and filled his plate.

The title of baron had accrued to Sylvestre Cabarus, whilom provincial lawyer, during the late imperial reign; but it was no more astonishing that he should now be the tool of a reactionary Government than that his patron, Fouché, former chief of Napoleon's diplomatic police, should sit Duc d'Otrante, Minister of Louis XVIII. Men with such genius for secrecy and intrigue have little difficulty in finding scope for their special talents, and pass almost inevitably from the master that was to the master that is.

Fouché, Duc d'Otrante, becoming Minister of Police, it followed, as the night the day, that Sylvestre Cabarus should become chief of the *Cabinet Noir*. Under Napoleon he had had almost sole charge of the English department of this relentless, far-reaching, admirably concealed inquisition.

The “Bureau Secret” of the Hôtel des Postes—the Black Office, as it was once called—was popularly believed to have been swept into oblivion by the Revolution. But so valuable a piece of Government machinery, perfected by more than a century of vigilant ingenuity, was too precious not to be resuscitated by subsequent parties in power. And, in fact, not even

under the Grand Monarque had it served the purpose of political tyranny better than under the late Napoleon, or present returned Bourbon.

Even in the Hôtel des Postes itself few officials ever knew of the existence of the Cabinet Noir on its premises ; the secret of its methods of work was sedulously kept by the Minister of Police, only entrusted to selected men of sagacity and proved discretion.

Sylvestre Cabarus was chief of the chosen five.

II

LYON'S INN

THE third-floor set on B stairs in Lyon's Inn was among the few less dismal in that melancholy, if picturesque, relic of old London. If its back windows, on the north side, gave upon the damp and grimy sombreness of Wych Street, on the inner side it looked upon the ancient quadrangle with its quaint hall, and rejoiced in all such sunlight as might be vouchsafed the town; and in season, too, upon the green of the antique mulberry-tree and the two giant sycamores that, through many generations, had clung to life in spite of fog and coaly smoke.

On this early September morning the chambers in B3, with their long casements open to a blue sky and a scurrying easterly wind, were almost cheery, for all dimness of the low ceiling and its cracked disrepair, the disjointedness of the panels that had gone on with their slow warping and worm-holiness since the days of King Hal, the billowing of the humpy boards that had borne the tread of so many generations of students or practitioners of chicanery when Lyon's was an Inn of Chancery; of so many retiring and solitary tenants, often mysterious, if not actually suspect, after it had become a mere rookery of chambers available for all purposes except family life.

But their appearance, cheerful or the reverse, mattered little to the present tenant. They were now occupied by one who had all the good things of life within him—youth, health, carelessness—and was little affected by mere surroundings.

Mr. Julian Chalfont was undoubtedly the youngest dweller that the Inn had known for many a decade. And there was no mystery about him. A gentleman—that was patent at the very first glance—but one in avowedly modest circumstances; who, pending possible improvements in his fortunes—a contingency he never gave out as probable—was content with apartments the rent of which he would not be likely to find himself unable to pay. An independent youth who, while leisurely “pursuing the law,” lived his life in London in an eclectic, not specially foolish, manner. An attractive youth, besides, in spirit and appearance.

Both spirit and appearance were conspicuous at this moment—the chimes of St. Mary in the Strand close to the west, and St. Clement Danes close to the east, were carolling ten of the clock. He was engaged on his daily “glove mill” with one of the lesser stars of the pugilistic profession, Mr. William Nash—known to the ring as Toady Nash—whose residence in the neighbouring Coal-Hole by the Thames was convenient to a frequent attendance at Lyon’s Inn.

The patrician youth, bare to the waist, revealed a torso as typical of male grace and vigour as that of the slenderer of Canova’s pair of gladiators in the Belvedere; and the manner in which he bore, not only thereon but upon his well-favoured face, the punishment administered by Mr. Nash, proclaimed, as perhaps only boxing can pro-

claim, that cheerful loyalty of mettle that is the best attribute of true manliness.

“Come, Muster Chalfont!” the man was growling genially in his husky voice which, in conjunction with his squat bow-legs and the wideness of his mouth, had no doubt earned him his nickname. “Come, once more! You hain’t got the ’ang of it yet, nohow. See ’ere—very simple, I calls it! Double fib on the bellows and duck your nut, then the hook on the point of the kissing-trap. Ah, there you are again; you won’t duck! Then you cop it, that’s all. Can’t escape it—see!”

This was illustrated by a thudding punch between the two smiling eyes of the neophyte.

“Well, now,” the teacher went on, in a tone of injured benevolence, “it fairly beats me, it does, swap me, that you can’t see that! Try again! Dash my goggles, we must have it right!”

But the pupil, who, in slipping round, now faced the door, instead of squaring up again, raised a deprecating hand.

“Hold hard a minute, Toady. Whom have we here—a patron of yours?”

The door was open, and, closely framed in it—for, like all the doors of our old Inns, it was both low and narrow—stood the figure of a tall, middle-aged man in fashionable, if slightly foreign attire: a man in bottle-green redingote, brimstone buckskins, Hessian boots, and a high white stock. In one hand he held a curly-brimmed grey beaver, and in the other, with an easy attitude, a gold-headed, thick malacca cane. His countenance, fixed in somewhat forbidding gravity, was unmistakably handsome.

As soon as he met the young man’s inquiring

giance, the newcomer advanced a pace into the room, made a slight bow, and, with a deliberate utterance and marked French accent, began his apology :

“ I demand a thousand pardons, sir. I knocked two times. Hearing only the sound of blows, I took the liberty of opening the door. But I will retire myself.”

“ Not at all ; pray come in. I was not prepared, as you may imagine, to receive visitors,” he said, looking down at his bare bust. “ But please come in ! ” He tore off his gloves and tossed them into a corner, eyeing the while the intruder with curiosity. Then, changing his speech to French, which he spoke fluently, albeit with soft English intonation : “ I am not mistaken,” he went on, “ in assuming that you are from across the Channel ? ”

“ You are right, sir,” came the answer in the same tongue. “ I arrive from Paris. I am addressing Mr. Chalfont ? ”

“ Yes. And I ? ”

“ The Baron Cabarus, if you will permit me to introduce myself. Connected—I mention this by way of credentials—with the Ministère de l'Intérieur.”

Sylvestre Cabarus, in his sedate, easy manner, placed his hat and stick upon a table, and pulling out his pocket-book, laid a coroneted card beside them.

“ Permit me to explain to you, as my excuse for intruding on you at an undue hour, that I have come over solely for the purpose of finding you.”

“ The deuce you have ? ” said the young man, with a laugh. “ I was not aware that anybody in the world took an interest in me. What

can it be that puts me in such request all of a sudden ? ”

“ Nothing, dear sir—let me make it clear from the outset—but what I believe you will be pleased to hear. Nevertheless, at some other hour, perhaps, more convenient——”

“ Why, by no means, if this one suits you. But will you not take a seat, Monsieur le Baron ? All the way from Paris, say you, to see me ? Faith, I could not give you the trouble of calling again ! Besides, I am bristling with curiosity. Just the time to put on some plumage again, and I am with you.—Toady, my trump,” he went on, turning to the pugilist, who was staring at the tall, handsome Frenchman with a look of contemptuous disfavour on his otherwise good-humoured countenance, “ no more barrel punching for to-day. It seems I have something to hear from this gentleman that is worth learning.”

“ Please yourself, Muster Chalfont, in course. I for one misdoubt if there’s anything you can learn in that lingo half as useful as that right ’ook at the point, which you ain’t got the ’ang on yet. But it’s all right, sir.”

Mr. Nash was pulling on his coatee over his sweater, and adjusting his neckcloth. He now accepted, with a scrape of the leg and a touch of his forelock, the glass of rum which his pupil had produced from some panel cupboard, and tossed it down with a cock of his eye at the foreigner, meant as a token of civility as well as of humour.

“ To-morrow, at the same hour, I suppose, sir ? ” he grunted.

“ Same hour, Toady.”

Mr. Nash took up his cap and left the room.

“ Monsieur le Baron, in a few minutes at your

service," said the young man, and retired to his bedchamber.

Left alone, Sylvestre Cabarus rose and rapidly looked about the room. Many indications of character may be gathered from a man's private surroundings ; and, for plans still in the forming, such indications were like to prove valuable. Books—not numerous, most of them of legal appearance, a few of sporting and more frivolous nature. Newspapers—the *Morning Herald* and *Bell's Life*. There, of course, the inquisitor could not differentiate. But, stuck in the narrow looking-glass on the mantelshelf, were a number of visiting and invitation cards. Sylvestre Cabarus, even outside his profession, had little scruple about glancing at private papers. This youth—he could already see—might live in an odd, mouldy retreat, in an unfashionable neighbourhood, but he did not keep himself altogether out of the world. Here, for instance, was unmistakably a coronet in the corner of one of sundry open letters that lay on the bureau. On the walls hung a few prints—views of country mansions, one of Windsor Castle in water-colours, two pictures of phenomenally perfect "keep-sake" beauty, an aquatint of some old Gothic gateway, labelled "Christ's College, Cambridge."

These, without conveying any special meaning for the spying eye of the foreigner, all confirmed his first impression that the young unknown he had traced down at last was possessed of some "consequence," as the French idiom puts it.

The impression was strengthened upon the reappearance of the owner of this singular nest. Julian Chalfont, *point-device* in attire, on the verge perhaps of dandyism, was as satisfying a

picture of quality as, in the "bare buff" of his morning's exercise, he had been of fresh and sappy manhood.

"Excuse my keeping you waiting," he said briskly; and busied himself in restoring the furniture to its proper place.

Sylvestre Cabarus watched him with a musing eye, and upon his emotionless face there came something akin to a ray of sympathetic admiration. But he relapsed into his set, formal manner as he took the one arm-chair that was being pushed forward for his accommodation.

"Well now, baron," said the youth, sitting astride in front of him and looking into his face with blue eyes wide with interest, "to what do I owe the honour—and, from what you gave me to expect—the pleasure of this visit?"

"It is rather a long story, sir."

"Why, since it is to be a good one, the longer the better! At any rate, my time is yours."

"In the first place, Mr. Chalfont," began Sylvestre Cabarus, taking out his snuff-box with an air that was centuries away from the Jacobin days of only twenty years before, "to make sure of my ground, I am speaking to Mr. Chalfont, son of Mistress Chalfont, who herself was born Comtesse de la Motte-Herbault?"

Julian straightened himself.

"My mother was a Motte-Herbault," he assented.

"She, the young comtesse, fled to England with her father in 'ninety-one, in a state of great destitution. You will forgive me; I merely state the fact that the rich estates of La Motte-Herbault were lost to the family during the horrors of the Revolution. She, however, soon found a home in this hospitable land, marrying

—it must have been in 'ninety-three—an Englishman, Mr. Chalfont. Am I right in believing that you are the only descendant of this happy union of two countries ? ”

“ You are quite right,” answered the young man, smiling at the quaintness of his visitor's phrase. “ But what can——”

“ One moment more, if you will allow me. The comte, your grandfather, then left England for that unfortunate expedition of Quiberon, where he lost his life. As for the lady your mother, I understand she died two years ago, a widow, and you are the only child. May I ask if you have any relatives living—relatives in the French line, I mean, of your parentage ? ”

“ None that I know of,” answered Julian, grave once more. “ The guillotine, the fusillade, Hoche and Moreau seem to have accounted for all. So, at least, my poor mother used to tell us.”

“ Then,” said the visitor, with a certain air of satisfied alertness, “ it is my pleasing duty to salute in you the last descendant of La Motte-Herbault.”

“ Is it ? ” Julian Chalfont looked up with a smile. “ Yes, the last descendant, as you say. But why pleasing ? ”

“ Pleasing, I mean,” explained Cabarus, with perfect gravity, “ to have found, at least, one descendant still alive.”

“ Found ? Have you, indeed, been at pains to find me ? ”

“ Consider, my young friend—permit me, even at this early stage, to call you so—it was not easy to discover after—what is it, twenty-four years ?—a French Motte-Herbault under the disguise of an English Chalfont. But now

I will not keep you further wondering about what my journey to this island has to do with you. Perhaps you will the sooner understand if you peruse this first."

So saying, Sylvestre Cabarus handed to Julian Chalfont a newspaper which he had drawn from the deep side-pocket of his redingote. It was the number of the *Moniteur*, dated ten days back, in which was discussed the question of the imminent reinstating of all ancient owners on the estates formerly confiscated by the Governments of the Revolution ; the question, in fact, which, even before the discovery made in Madame de Chambron's violated letter, had already begun to disturb the baron's equanimity.

Julian took the paper wonderingly, rose, went over to the window, and began to read. The visitor shifted himself in his seat to keep his eyes on him. He could soon mark the look of interest in the young man's face pass into one of excitement, note the colour deepen and fade again on his cheeks.

Once or twice the reader looked round, as though to exclaim or ask for confirmation, but eagerly resumed his reading in silence. At last he came back, thoughtfully folding the paper, gazed down at the messenger of glad tidings. Then he said slowly :

" Here is news indeed ! News that never at any time I had thought could come. It seems altogether too wonderful to be true, almost impossible to realise." He sat down again. " Why, if it means anything, it means a fortune—a kind of Heaven-sent fortune—after all ! " he went on, as if speaking to himself. Then, with a keen look at Cabarus : " But you, sir, who have taken the trouble to seek me out, who are you ? Ah,

I remember ; you told me your name, and that you are connected with—what was it, the Ministry of the Interior ? That does not convey much to me. I am an Englishman, you see. But how came you to know of my existence, to discover me, as you said ? And why ? ”

Sylvestre Cabarus smiled his diplomatic smile.

“ My dear young sir, I might answer that what you ask me to tell you is an official secret. We know a great many more things than the general public has any notion of. I am willing, however, to confess that until yesterday I was not aware of your existence. You, as you remarked just now, are an Englishman, and with Englishmen as such we have, of course, nothing to do. But a name like that of La Motte-Herbault is one which, under the Government now happily restored to France, is of our competence.”

“ No doubt—no doubt. But how did——”

Sylvestre Cabarus lifted his hand.

“ You must,” he resumed, “ rest satisfied with my assurance that, in the office which I fill, it is our business to know, and we do know. I came over to find a Motte-Herbault at Windsor. You see, I was well informed. Pray do not ask how. I would not be at liberty to tell you. At Windsor, to my disappointment, I learned that Mistress Chalfont was no more. But, by good fortune, I was able to pick up the thread again—as you perceive.”

“ That was clever of you. It is more than two years since, at my mother's death, I sold the place at Datchet and took up my abode here.”

Sylvestre Cabarus tapped his snuff-box complacently.

“ I flatter myself,” he said, in his even voice,

“ that with the means at my command, I could have traced you had you even been in concealment. But, of course, there was no question of concealment, and the matter was simple enough. Though no one knew the actual address of Mr. Julian Chalfont, her son, it came out that he belonged to Lincoln’s Inn, London. I thought, of course, this was some *hôtel garni*, an inn, you see—the sort of thing a stranger like me would think. I found it was a kind of college. Well, registers were consulted. Briefly, I was referred to this place, another inn! And—now within three days of my landing at Dover, I have the satisfaction of having found the grandson of the Comte de la Motte-Herbault. A great satisfaction, I assure you.”

Julian Chalfont answered with a smile and a nod the formal bow which had accompanied these last words.

“ I am sure it is reciprocated, Monsieur le Baron. Even if you did not bring me tidings fraught with such luring prospects, the pleasure of conversing with you in a tongue that I delight in—which, since I lost my mother, I have never an opportunity of speaking—would alone be great. But as yet I do not fully understand why you undertook personally this long journey. Any official communication to my mother, had she been alive, would have brought her, or her representative, to France, if necessary.”

“ In most instances, as you justly remark, such a procedure would have sufficed. But in the present one the affair is by no means so simple. You, on your own statement of a while ago, are an Englishman. You would, no doubt, experience difficulties, that would not be so great in the case of the numerous *émigrés* that

are now flocking back to France, in establishing your rights. It is, you must admit, of importance that all claims should be unimpeachable. To cut the matter short, I was not prepared—I mean, in my capacity as one dealing with what was formerly called *biens nationaux*, and has since again become private ownership—to enter into negotiations without having previously secured proofs—proofs to the hilt, as I might say—of the rightfulness of the claim, of the real identity——”

Julian Chalfont suddenly rose, colouring.

“Upon my word, one would think, sir, from all this show of caution, that it was I who had sought you, and was advancing claims which have to be substantiated. But as to identity, since that is what you are pursuing——”

“Pray, Mr. Chalfont”—Sylvestre Cabarus spoke in his most even voice, and with that detached *grand seigneur* manner that the whilom Republican had cultivated to perfection—“listen to me with patience. It is surely the least I may ask of you, in consideration of the trouble I am taking on behalf of your family. The strength of the claim, since we must use the word, rests entirely upon the identity of the claimant. I myself, having traced you here from trustworthy sources, have no doubts whatsoever that you are a grandson of the Comte de la Motte-Herbault, through the comtesse your mother. Further corroborative evidence, if I had required it, I would find in the exceptional fluency of your French, so rare among your countrymen. And, again, I would find in the peculiar type of good looks which madame your mother—herself a notably handsome person—has transmitted to you.”

Julian Chalfont, who, for all his Gallic connection, was too completely an Englishman not to resent anything in the nature of open flattery, brushed the remark aside with an impatient gesture. The baron, responsively altering his line of discussion, went on in more purely business tones :

“ To come straight to the point, the position is this. The property of La Motte-Herbault—farms, château, woods, and all the rest of it—was sequestered at the Revolution. In time, however, it was sold on behalf of the Government to private purchasers, who are still the occupiers, and who naturally cling to it. But the counter-revolution has come, one of the purposes of which is to reinstate, if possible, all the original owners.

“ Now, there is no doubt that if a proved lineal descendant of Hubert-François-Marie, Comte de la Motte-Herbault, comes forward to lodge his claim before the court which, as you saw in that journal, is about to be constituted in Paris, he will obtain his rights. What I personally may have to adduce in this affair will, of course, be useful evidence. But the court will naturally require much more than that—clenching documentary proofs, in fact. I leave you to imagine the swarms of possible claimants that we expect to see turning up after these twenty-five years, with more or less plausible cases, as soon as the decree becomes widely known. Upon my faith,” said Sylvestre Cabarus, smiling as if to himself while he took a refreshing pinch, “ we may await some lively times in the Senate this autumn ! Now, Mr. Chalfont,” he resumed, getting up in his turn, “ am I to say that this English gentleman whom I have been at pains to find is coming forward ? ”

Julian Chalfont's annoyance had quite vanished by this time.

"Why, Monsieur le Baron!" he cried, boyishly exultant once more, "I think you may venture upon that statement. Château, farms, woods—Mr. Chalfont, of Lyon's Inn, châtelain of La Motte-Herbault! Heavens, I trust this is not a dream!" He gave his forehead a sounding thump with his knuckles, breathed deeply, and laughed again. "No, I am awake! Or that you are playing some practical joke on me?" he suddenly added with a look of anxiety.

Sylvestre Cabarus had a benevolent smile for the young man's excitement.

"The questionable taste of the joke, my dear sir, would lie at the door of the Senate. Do you think that so grave a body—I'll keep that journal, thanks—No," he went on, returning the paper to his pocket; "the matter is grave and important enough. Do you possess, or have you access to, sufficient documents to prove not only your descent, but, what would be also to be desired, that no other Motte-Herbault—you understand?" There was genuine concern on the baron's face. "It would be a pity if, after all, your title as direct descendant should at any time be traversed."

Julian had begun pacing the room. He was thoughtful, and his visitor eyed him now with some anxiousness.

"I had never thought of such a contingency," said the youth. "Of course, all the documents concerning me and my mother since she came to England are at hand. But I think I have a good deal more than that—family papers of all sorts that my grandfather was able to bring over. He was, so my mother told me, one of

the first to leave France—he foresaw more clearly than some what was likely to happen. Well, it is all in a cāse deposited at the bank. Perhaps you would care to come with me—it is close by—we might have a look through its contents together ? ”

Sylvestre Cabarus remained silent awhile with swiftly revolving thoughts.

“ No,” he decided. “ After all, I do not see why I should. I have heavy claims on my time, and the sorting of private papers—that is your own business. But, if you like, I can call again ; shall we say this evening ? About seven ? Good ! I can then review your selection of documents, and I may be able to advise you, if you will allow me, as to what it would be wise to take with you across the water.”

“ Take with me ? Faith, I had lost sight of that—a journey to France, to Paris ! How often have I fancied that treat ! My funds, though, never could run to it ! ”

Sylvestre Cabarus now blended his best air of easy dignity with a kind of paternal benevolence.

“ I have known—known but too well—that condition in a young man’s affairs,” he said, smiling charmingly. “ But, with such an inheritance at the journey’s end, never let the question of cash vex you. If the loan of some few thousand francs would simplify matters, let not Monsieur Chalfont de la Motte-Herbault hesitate.”

The young man flushed again, but he smiled back.

“ In verity you are kind,” he said, in his pleasant young voice ; “ but, no, this is obviously a business journey, if it is to be, and the funds

shall run to it. Will my stay have to be a long one—for the settlement of affairs, I mean—do you think? ”

A certain grimness hardened the baron's genial countenance; but only for a transient spell.

“ Why, sir,” he answered, “ I think it would be wise not to fix a date for your return. You may certainly have to remain a long while in France, if things turn out as I have reason to hope. But,” he added, with a smile, “ it will certainly not matter much to you then financially. Of that you may rest assured. One word of advice, though. Beyond letting it be known that you may be some time away, you need not even say where, it would be wise to breathe word to no one, for the immediate present, of your altered prospects. You see the force of the suggestion, of course? You may account yourself lucky if eventually you find your estate adjudicated to you without one or more interloper trying to forestall you. *Peste*, that would be the devil! That is, of course, your own business, yet I, on my side, should be sorry that my journey should have been wasted. Therefore, be discreet! ”

“ Dumb as a carp! ” cried Julian, in rattling spirits. “ That is the right French simile, is it not? No, no, I trust to Heaven it will not be wasted. The devil! It will be no fault of mine if—What, must you go? Well, we meet this evening, anyhow? But I will see you out. One second! ”

He dived into his inner room. Sylvestre Cabarus seized the moment to take up again his own visiting-card, that still lay on the table and replace it in his case.

“ Careful now with your hat on these corkscrew stairs, baron ! ” called the young man, reappearing with a tasselled cane and an unimpeachable beaver. “ They advance it as a proof,” he went on, as he led the way down, “ of the extreme antiquity of these old Inns of ours that the stairs were obviously built before the invention of intoxicating liquors. For no one, save in a state of severest sobriety, could possibly use them without breaking his neck ! ”

In the quadrangle, as he pointed out certain quaint features of the buildings which seemed to the foreigner so singular a dwelling-place for a young man of Mr. Chalfont’s status, they halted a moment by the sun-dial—that apparently indispensable adjunct to all the old legal rookeries of London. The sun was nearing its highest in the blue, and, by no means a common occasion in that dank courtyard, threw a sharp line of shadow upon the plate. Julian bent over it smilingly, and pointed with his finger at the Latin motto:

“ ‘ I record none but brilliant hours,’ ” he translated. “ Why, this for once is apposite, for me, at least, in this place—the hour of your first visit, Monsieur le Baron ! ” Sylvestre Cabarus inclined his head benignantly. “ By the way,” the Englishman went on, “ where do you put up ? ”

— “ At the George, near London Bridge. That is where the Dover diligence—your mail-coach—deposited me.”

“ Ah, then I can escort you a little farther. I am—you see I lose no time—going to the bank, Child’s Bank, which is on your road.”

Presently, as they came in sight of Temple Bar :

“ I never thought,” remarked Julian, “ these hundreds of times, when I passed under these gateways, that, up in that room yonder—you see, the one over the arch, with the lead-paned window between the niches, that’s the muniment-room at the bank—I never thought that fate and fortune lay waiting for me like some fairy godmother’s gift ! I expect when my poor grandfather and other noble *émigrés* deposited their papers in British safe keeping they were far from guessing how long they would lie there—to do the trick at last ! Now we shall soon know. Well, there is your way, straight on, past St. Paul’s, which you will presently see glistening up yonder. About seven, then, and I trust I may have the right things to exhibit.”

Under the narrow archway there was, on the side of Sylvestre Cabarus, a grave lifting of the hat and a bow ; on that of Julian Chalfont, a cheery flourish and a pleasant nod.

And thus they parted, the visitor pensively threading his way down Fleet Street, while the youth rushed into the premises of Messrs. Child, the wealthy and aristocratically connected bankers.

Although he had pleaded a multitude of affairs as calling upon his time during his short stay in England, the hours between this first parting with the claimant to the estate of La Motte-Herbault and the next meeting were all spent by the Baron Cabarus in meditation. He walked the streets with little care for the novel sights about him until he was stopped in his eastward stroll by the Tower. The vision of that grim pile, London’s fortress and State prison, might well have brought back memories of the far-off days when, a red-hot Jacobin, he had acclaimed

the fall of the Tower of Paris, the Bastille. If so, however, it was only to emphasise a sense of the betterment of the world as far as he was concerned, and the necessity for the Baron Cabarus to safeguard his brilliant future.

That the tenor of his plannings was not free from doubts and irresolution may be surmised from the fact that he had no thought for refreshment. He returned slowly back to his hotel, and there, in a lonely, comfortless room, began restlessly pacing, walking and staring unseeingly upon the bustle of Leadenhall Street; once sitting down to begin a letter to his wife, which, however, progressed no further than a "*Ma bonne amie*" at the head of the page. The time slipped by upon his unquiet thoughts till a striking clock warned him of the lateness of the hour.

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Julian Chalfont was at the top of the narrow winding stairs, holding a candle aloft.

"Come in, baron; come in!" he cried as he heard the first groping steps. "I have been on the look-out for you. Upon my word, it is an outrage to make any respectable person come to such a place after dark."

The voice rang pleasantly, and the greeting—for, in his light-heartedness, the Englishman forgot even that hint of French formality he had assumed in the morning—was now with a frank handshake.

"Well," he went on, taking hat and cane from his visitor's hands, "here you are safe, anyhow. Make yourself comfortable. I have lit a little fire; our evenings are damp in old London. I don't suppose, now, you ever dream of a fire in September in your bright Paris? You must

make allowances for the shortcomings of a mere bachelor's den. But that arm-chair is tolerable ; fall into the arms it extends to you. And I have here a bottle of rather special Madeira. Let me help you."

Julian rattled on gaily, bustling, stirring the fire, trimming his candles afresh. Cabarus watched him in silence, but acknowledging the open-hearted attentions with slight gestures of thanks. He drank the proffered wine.

"To your success, Mr. Chalfont," he said.

And, just for a moment, as he met the youth's smiling eyes, there came a softening of his set features.

"So may it be ! I'll drink to you who will have been the bringer of it.—Yes," cried Julian, pointing to a heap of parchments and papers on the table, "I have spent the day in collecting and looking through these. And, I may say, if every *émigré* returning to France is half as well equipped with documents as I seem to be, why, then the work of your Court of Restitution, or whatever you call it, ought to be simple enough. And now, if you care, and can spare the time, we will look through them together."

He sat down at the table, and Cabarus dragged his arm-chair nearer.

"So you think, baron," said Julian Chalfont when, about an hour later, he began tying up the papers again and sorting certain parcels into separate heaps, "that this will do, eh ?"

Cabarus had risen and was standing, bending, with his knuckles on the table. There was an extraordinary look of satisfaction on his face.

"It is quite evident," he said, "that no one can adduce a lineal descent but yourself. These

are valuable things, my dear sir. Be careful of them."

"Careful! You may wager on that, baron, to use our English phrase," the young man called out, as he replaced the bundles in their box.

"Faith, you are one of the fortunate, Mr. Chalfont," went on Cabarus, looking keenly at the handsome face. "The good things of this world will not have come too late with you— young, strong, happily favoured, gaily disposed, and with a fortune at hand. Able to graft, so to speak, if you choose, a new, vigorous, family branch upon that noble old stock that was thought to be exhausted."

The words struck the young man. He stopped a moment in his task and looked up with a sudden musing air.

"Family branch!" he said, after a while. "Now, how strange you should say that! It is just the thought that once or twice this afternoon came to me when it grew evident that if proof was all that was wanted I had it here. Yes, I have dreamed of such a thing many a time in this lonely old hole. Not that life is bad as it is, you know; but a home, a wife, children— ah, yes, children I would have nothing to leave to! That was the rub. How can a gentleman on a couple of hundreds—but, halt there! It will be time enough to think of grafting family branches"—he laughed lightly and resumed his work—"when I have the woods of La Motte-Herbault about me."

It was Sylvestre Cabarus' turn now to be struck into a muse. There was a spell of silence, during which he kept the young man under his pensive gaze: a gaze which the latter, looking up, caught with sudden concern.

"No fresh doubt about anything?" he asked ruefully.

"Less than ever, less than ever," returned the other, smiling this time with unassumed geniality.

"Thank Heaven! You really frightened me, you know. You looked quite odd. But, well now, we must live the day, happen what may. I have taken the liberty to assume that you, as a stranger, would accept what hospitality I can offer, and have dinner with me. In fact, I have ordered it. What say you?"

A change had certainly come over Sylvestre Cabarus; he felt an appetite, in fact, a ravenous hunger.

"I say," he answered in his best manner, "that you simply suggest a double pleasure—not to lose your company yet awhile, and to do full honour to your fare. I have been run off my feet," he explained. "I actually had no time to snatch a morsel to-day."

Ten minutes later, the valuable box safely locked up in the inner room, Mr. Chalfont—as he would have said in his Cantab days—sporting his oak and sallied forth with his visitor. And, arm in arm, two friends highly pleased with each other, they strolled once more past Temple Bar, and repaired to the Mitre. There, at the secluded end of the long, panelled room of that time-gloried tavern, they found a table arranged, with some special care as to cut glass and silverware, awaiting them.

The menu, while remaining short of extravagance, was choice; not devoid of game as well as of prime English roast. The wine, in honour of the guest's most likely taste, was select Gascony. But the indispensable port duly made its appearance with the fruit and walnuts.

All the preoccupation which—though of widely different nature in each—had weighed on both of them was lifted. And with the effect of succulent fare upon physical comfort, a certain expansiveness began to urge the speech on both sides of the table. Sylvestre Cabarus, who, certes, was no man to wear his heart upon his sleeve, kept it, all generous vintage notwithstanding, under wise control. But Julian's single-mindedness gave it full freedom.

John Topham, the venerable head waiter of the Mitre, who had known Mr. Chalfont for some years, and who, if truth had been told, was probably shocked to find that very pattern of a young English gentleman prove, from one day to the other, actually more garrulous in a foreign language than ever before in honest English, eyed him with sad, if respectful, concern.

Strange to say—and yet, perhaps, not so very strange in young three-and-twenty—what seemed to move Julian Chalfont almost more than the prospect of a fortune was the allure-ment of foreign travel; of travel especially to that France his mother used to recall with such love and regret. It was, above all, the romance of the venture.

" Blessings on this peace ! " he called once to his guest over the ruby of his glass. " We can be friends now, friends in all sincerity. And blessed be my mother, for many things indeed, but not the least for having taught me her tongue. Ah, how sweet it can sound in a woman's voice ! "

Cabarus laughed gently.

" Sweet enough on pretty lips, no doubt. You will, at any rate, be able to test that for yourself—soon."

"Soon!" echoed Julian with renewed glee. "Of course, soon. That reminds me—in the whole of this matter I must ask you to be my guide—when ought I, in your opinion, to go over? The sooner the better, say I. What say you?"

Cabarus, toying with his glass, appeared to consider.

"There is," he said at last, "of course no hurry for some time. But, after all, the sooner you lodge your papers in Paris, the better. I myself had thought of taking the Dover packet on Saturday. And I propose to take a *chaise de poste* at Calais. I cannot stand," he explained, with lordly unconcern of cost, "our rumbling diligences. Now I think of it, may I not offer you a seat in it? I shall be alone, and it is a weary road. In truth, if you accept, I shall remain indebted to you."

The offer was too attractive, too cordially made, to be refused. The journey together was agreed upon with many additional little plans full of pleasantness. The suggestion, in hospitable English fashion, of a further bottle to close the evening having been firmly declined, Julian insisted on escorting his guest as far as London Bridge; cheerily parted from him at the door of the George; and, like one treading on air, retraced the two miles back to the old inn, his mind filled with captivating pictures of the new life about to begin.

As for Sylvestre Cabarus, in his bare hotel room, amid the deep silence of the City at night, he sat up till the smaller hours began to strike, writing—writing that letter to his wife which during the day he had attempted in vain to

indite out of a whirlpool of scheming. Now he had come at last to a decision, and was in tune to write about it. Indeed, he wrote about it twice that night, and in singularly different styles :

“My good wife”—he began afresh—“you will, I know, rejoice to hear that the purpose of my journey is already and successfully achieved. In one day’s work I have found what I came to seek. The mother is dead ; but the son—for there is a son, sure enough—the rock upon which our ship was like to split—is alive. I, however, have him in hand. Therefore, you may rest assured that, whichever of the many schemes (already considered in detail) it may be necessary to put into operation, he shall never cause the wreck that seemed so inevitable but the other day.

“Poor youth ! I say this (though it may astonish you, who know me so well) because I have actually taken a kind of liking for him. Poor youth ! He little guesses with what facility and completeness the menace he unconsciously carries with him could be suppressed, should the occasion demand it. We shall see. Meanwhile, I have impressed it well on him not to mention to any living soul what is in the wind. He knows my name—that was unavoidable. But, as matters seem to be turning out, it is as well I made no mystery about that. At any rate, I have reason to feel confident that he will not mention it to anyone ; so I hold things thus far in the palm of my hand.

“I had at least three programmes to select from—each, I believe, absolutely perfect—that could have been acted upon between here and Paris, not to speak of another, equally con-

clusive, applicable in Paris itself, should it, after all, be necessary to have final recourse to—you know what. But I trust, now, none of them may be required, as I shall explain presently.

“Let me first say, dear wife, that you may expect to see us in less than a week. It will be necessary for you to make preparations accordingly. And now I will astonish you. If all moves as, from what I have been able to observe to-day, I may reasonably hope, we shall have good cause to be grateful, after all, for that meddling letter which——”

At this point Sylvestre Cabarus suddenly broke off, looking fixedly before him. A smile, oddly compounded of sarcasm and wonder, hovered about his lips.

After a pause, acting upon a whimsical impulse, he wrote on, but now in a hurried, scarcely legible scrawl, as it were, having a joke at his own self :

“But, *ma douce amie*, it would look really as if that wine of Porto with which our doomed young friend has plied Sylvestre Cabarus to-night had blunted his wits, lowered them to the level of that excellent, confiding public that never dreams of a certain filter once called the Cabinet Noir. If I know my Fouché, he would not at all object to a copy of a letter of his trusty Cabarus, for once in a way.

“Oh, Sylvestre—Sylvestre ! Thou and thy schemes, each absolutely perfect ! ”

He unconsciously gave a loud laugh, which, in the silence and the solitude, well-nigh startled him, dashed the pen upon the table, rose, and held the sheet to the candle-flame. When the last crinkling fragment had floated down, he poured out and at one breath drank off a tumbler

of cold water. Then, chuckling, sat down once more ; reflected a long while, and began again.

And the next day the Dover-Calais packet carried to France Cabarus' second letter :

“ My sweet wife, you will, I know, be rejoiced to hear that I have found our friend of the correspondence to be a truly charming as well as a worthy young man. Indeed, I have almost lost my heart to him already.

“ He is, I gather, by no means rich, although in appearance quite a dandy. But, after all, what of it ? Are we not sufficiently well-provided to safeguard the future of our beloved child ? She, I need hardly say, and you, my good wife, have not a minute been out of my thoughts these days ; and I have the joy of telling you that everything bodes in the most complete manner for the happy issue of our hopes.

“ True, as I said, the youth has little fortune ; but he is quite the best-looking lad I ever set eyes upon ; withal frank, open-hearted, and gay. He might almost be a Frenchman. Indeed, not only does he speak our tongue with but the slightest accent, but he loves already—that is quite evident—everything French.

“ Well, where in the whole of our France will he find anything more lovable than our darling Marianne ? You understand how happy it makes me to find that he is anxious to accompany me on my return.

“ Of course, I did not speak much on business matters ; but he is a lad of understanding. He has lost no time in collecting, and he is bringing with him, every paper that can possibly be of use in this affair. I need not say of what good augury this is to our hopes of the future.

“ You must prepare for our guest. This idea of keeping him under our roof, instead of letting him live about Paris—with devil knows what possible consequences—has only come into my head this evening. You will understand what to do ; I am sure it will be well done. But one word of stringent recommendation : Marianne must not, on any account, know—at least, for the present—the purpose of our friend’s journey to France. Girls, these days, are so romantic. If she were to find it out before the proper time, my prettiest plan might be upset.

“ Meanwhile, have the little apartment in the wing made ready, in the event of his falling in with my hospitable invitation. What say I ? He shall accept it. And everything, mind, in the best style. Our young man may have a short purse, but there can be no doubt that he is quite familiar with the comforts and elegancies of a good house. There is, of course, no reason why he should not find them all at our family mansion ; therefore, spare no expense.

“ As for the rest, trust to me. Whatever the immediate outcome of my journey, the ultimate result shall not be failure.

“ I embrace you tenderly. Burn this at once. Marianne must not see it ; but give her her father’s love, and tell the cherished child that he is working for her, as ever, but tell her no more.”

III

THE HÔTEL DE PIMODAN

It was on the seventh day after his return to Paris, in the noble old mansion of the Ile Saint Louis, that the family affair so skilfully conducted hitherto by the Baron Cabarus reached its crisis ; a crisis totally unexpected.

Up to then everything had moved smoothly.

“ My dear Mr. Chalfont,” had said Sylvestre Cabarus, speaking as by a sudden impulse, when the well-appointed chaise, after clattering along the pavement of endless narrow streets, came at last upon the fair open space facing the island, “ I have found your company so pleasant all this too short time that I am loth to relinquish it as yet. Behold my house, over there. In another minute we shall be at the door. Do me the favour to accept its hospitality—for the first few days, at least—until you have found your footing in this town.”

The mansion of white stone, with its curveting ironwork and its graceful line of roof, before which the chaise was drawing to a halt, looked noble in the sunset glow—nobler, truth to say, than anything Julian Chalfont had associated with his travelling companion, captivating as he had found him.

“ My wife,” Cabarus had gone on, “ will make

you welcome. We live simply enough ; nevertheless, you will see more of our French life than at an hotel." And he had smilingly waved aside the half-hearted first refusal of the fascinated youth.

For fascination is the only word that could describe Julian's state of mind ever since he had crossed the threshold of his new life under the guidance of Cabarus. France, and all things French, had become revealed to him in an utterly new aspect—smiling, beckoning, and at the same time pathetic. France, land of his martyred sires ; his own country, after all, as much as the England he loved so well ; France, the land where his fortune awaited him !

As for the ambassador of it, the first Frenchman with whom he had been brought into real intimacy, the handsome man with his frank, quiet geniality, none had ever walked more worthy of sympathy and confidence. As good a fellow as the truest of true Englishmen !

And, indeed, the days as they passed had been packed full of satisfaction ; and the days that were to come shone before him with a heightened glamour. He was attuned to find a greeting in every new impression that came his way.

When he had been ushered into the great drawing-room with the balconied windows and the celebrated green lacquer panels and the ceiling painted by Lesueur—that wonderful room which had once been the temple of Lauzun's profligate elegancies—and there had been graciously received by an extraordinarily handsome hostess, he had felt as if every step he took into the new life was revealing fresh marvels. And yet he had one greater still to meet.

As he sat, rather shyly partaking of the collation that had been brought in upon a rolling table—russet grapes of Fontainebleau, white, crisp rolls, and glasses of straw-coloured wine—an inner door opened, and a girl entered the room. When she moved across the windows the glow of the sunset tinged her white dress with warm ambers and rose-reds ; seemed to wrap her in a benign flame. When she reached the table, she flung herself without a word in her father's arms. Cabarus, after repeatedly kissing her forehead, tenderly caressing her hair, turned back to his guest and, still holding her hands, introduced her :

“ My daughter, Mr. Chalfont. Our only child. Marianne, here is an English gentleman whom I met in London. He has business in Paris, and will give us the pleasure of remaining with us until it is settled.”

She disengaged herself on these last words ; looked quickly and in some surprise at her father, then at the youth with a widening glance of curiosity ; then curtsied. And what Julian saw in her was a beauty of a kind which, even in his own land of fair women, he had never met—a face of classic regularity ; brown eyes darkly set in dimming lids, large and brilliant as they had opened full upon him, but now veiled behind incredibly long, dark lashes ; a skin of even purity, strangely white under bandeaux of heavy black hair ; a mouth of incredibly perfect curve, red as the red rose of June ; the beauty of her *Arlésienne* mother in the young April of life.

As she, somewhat hesitatingly, took the hand which he proffered, English-wise and forgetful of French manner, the fresh breath of some flowery scent he had never known before struck

him subtly. And the impression mingled with and for ever remained attached to the sound of her voice, grave and clear. What she said he could not remember ; but the sound of it, and the French of it, and the welcoming of it was a joy that remained with him.

Surely he was passing from one enchantment to another ! And he yielded himself to the stream of fate without an effort at steering his own course. A conscious captive and a submissive—Yet how completely captive he himself was unable to realise.

The hospitality of the noble old mansion was perfect. Cabarus had the genius of detail. The apartment allotted to the guest was, it is true, quite separate—the half-deserted mansion could have provided several such, if required. The whilom village notary was alert not to sin against the ethics of the reigning aristocracy, in whose eyes certainly the admission of a young gentleman into the same household as a marriageable young lady would have been a serious offence. Nevertheless, in spite of this well-devised air of independence, a fair intimacy remained possible. Indeed, hospitality made it imperative that the guest should at least take his meals with his hosts.

“ The times,” had said Cabarus, when he called upon Julian, on the first morning to tell him that déjeuner would be at noon, “ are not quite ripe yet for lodging your appeal. But I shall find occasion to set the matter in train for you during the week. Meanwhile, let it be your business, my young friend, to spend your hours pleasantly. I have to be out most of the day, and late at night. But the baronne will always be ready to pilot you. What I wish you to

understand is that here you are in your own house."

And so the week had passed, almost like a dream.

Although he and the daughter of the house met daily, they never, of course, met alone. French custom is rigid in such matters. Nothing but accident could have brought such a juncture about. The accident occurred at last.

Julian, after roaming along the riverside all in the bright coldness of the shortening autumn day, his head filled, not with promises of his coming fortunes—these had now receded to the middle distance in his thought pictures—but with the perfume and the music of that strange girl's presence; with fleeting resolves, plans resting on nothing, to break somehow through the baffling reserve behind which there was so much he yearned to know. Marianne Cabarus was inscrutable, at least to the eyes of the flesh. She was very silent; but, when she spoke, her words came clear, and musical, and ready—her silence was not shyness. And Julian instinctively felt that her singular reserve was not that of mere coldness either; knew that, behind her composure, thoughts were seething. Her eyes were generally cast down; but when she raised them, they shot open inquiry, sympathy, or rebuke.

That afternoon he had been irresistibly impelled to anticipate a little the hour at which he had arranged to meet his hosts. Already looked upon by the servants as one of the family, he was ushered unannounced into the great lacquer-panelled room.

On his entrance, Marianne, immersed in the depths of an arm-chair by the hearth, warming

her shapely sandalled feet at the glow of a dying wood-fire, languidly turned her head; but, recognising him, rose with a quick movement, and came towards him.

It was the first time he had ever found himself alone with her, even for the briefest moment. For the first time also, of her own accord, she gave him her hand in English style.

"Mr. Chalfont," she said frankly, without any preamble, "I was just thinking of you. I am so glad you have come. My mother will soon be here, and you know"—she looked at him between her lashes, and a smile played for an instant upon the red lips habitually so demure—"it is not easy to talk, when she is here, upon anything but what she herself chooses to speak about."

Astonished at this sudden leap in the progress of their intercourse, and with heart beating so fast for pleasure that he could hardly find a few halting words, he retained her hand longer, perhaps, than mere salutation demanded. She became grave again, looked at him for a moment keenly and now with widening eyes. Then she withdrew her hand; and straightway, without bidding him to be seated:

"Mr. Chalfont," she said, in the voice with the double chord, low and yet so clear, that always ravished him, "I must speak when I can. Tell me quickly, in all loyalty, what is this affair which has brought you here with my father? A mystery has been hanging over our house ever since my mother received his letter from London. She would not let me see it, anxious as I was to have news, for it was the first time he had gone so far away from us. And when you appeared, I was enjoined never to question

you. Of course, if the business only affected you, I would never have even thought of intruding on it. But I know it affects us—us all. Think : a matter which has brought you, from one day to the other, into our family life—a very remarkable thing, as you must know, in France. What is it ? ”

She was facing him, and he, as he listened, gazed back at her, unconsciously smiling into her eyes.

“ What has brought me to France,” he answered, “ is a purely private family affair. It only affects me—except in so far that the baron takes a kindly interest in it. He has offered me his help, in some official capacity, which I do not quite understand, but which I welcome, which indeed I bless, since it has brought me here.”

His voice had grown warmer with every word. He made a movement to draw a step nearer. But she, shaking her head, as though to deprecate the raising of a new issue, kept her inquiring gaze upon him. He went on :

“ I understand that it were best to speak little about it until, as your father himself had it, times were ripe. But there is really no mystery. Indeed, I should love to be the first to tell you, for it will soon be known to anyone who cares ; and, at any rate, if the secret must be kept a little longer, I am sure you will keep it as well as your father. May I——”

He hesitated. She inclined her head.

“ Go on,” she said quickly. “ There is a carriage coming in—my mother returning, I think.”

“ Well,” he resumed, keeping her under the caress of his gaze, “ in all likelihood—in fact,

I understand it is a certainty—if I duly follow the lines traced for me, I am about to recover some French property that was once in my family—my mother's family—and I came over——”

He stopped short. She had made a sudden movement, as one taken aback by some unsuspected new current. A twist of bitter disappointment passed over his mouth. She stared a moment, then dropped the lashes over the wondering and angry doubt that had come into her eyes.

“Some property! I see—I understand,” she said at last, in a harder voice. “Mr. Chalfont, what was your mother's family?”

“She was a Comtesse de la Motte-Herbault,” he answered, and broke off again, bewildered and distressed. Colour had mounted to her white forehead, and she was panting. “But why——”

He was unable to go on; the door opened, and the Baronne Cabarus, followed by her husband, entered the room.

They both in turn cast a quick, inquisitive glance at the young couple standing in the middle of the room, obviously in a state of agitation. They now exchanged a look. There was an awkward tension which Cabarus immediately tried to relieve by his easy geniality.

“You are punctual, Mr. Chalfont. More than we can say for ourselves. Please excuse us—a block along the quays.”

“Not at all—not at all! It is I, you know,” said Julian rather incoherently, still under his disconcerting impression. “I was before my time. My watch, I fear, is rather mad—an old piece, uncertain——”

He had pulled the watch from his fob, and was nervously toying with it.

"Well, it is time for the *gouter*, anyhow!" cried the baronne, without a sign of noticing anything amiss. "Marianne, darling child, ring the bell."

But without a movement, the girl called out in her quiet, clear voice:

"It does look quite old-fashioned, Mr. Chalfont. Let me see it. I am fond of those beautiful old watches. An heirloom, of course," she said, receiving it from his hand, and slowly going to the window to examine it in the better light.

Almost immediately she gave a cry of surprise:

"How extraordinary! Come and look, father! And you, too, maman! This escutcheon. Why, here are the same arms as those on the chimney-mantel at La Motte-Herbault. Even the device, see! *En Dieu mon espérance!* It is very faint, but you can make it out—the same as at La Motte-Herbault. Is not this extraordinary!"

No one in the room moved. The baronne, from her smiling pretence at unconcern, grew serious, Cabarus' face became set; both had that look of preparing to meet at last an expected situation. As for Julian, he dropped into a new bewilderment.

The girl's eyes swept gravely over her father and her mother, to end with a faintly mocking, bitter smile upon the young man's countenance.

"Is it not extraordinary, Mr. Chalfont?" she repeated, and restored the watch to his hand.

"Nothing extraordinary in my grandfather's arms adorning a watch of his," he said. "Thanks! But how come you to be so familiar with them? Ay, and with La Motte-Herbault?"

Her face had resumed its pallor. For a moment she remained still, her eyes cast down, in her usual attitude.

“What I meant by extraordinary, sir,” she said at last coldly, “is that you should profess not to know that La Motte-Herbault belongs to us—La Motte-Herbault, where I was born!”

Julian stepped back, staring at her like one thunderstruck. She moved past him, but paused a moment at the door.

“What odious comedy is it?” she said, with a rising tremor in her voice—and he never knew whether the words were addressed to him or to her father—“that has been played for me ever since Mr. Chalfont set foot in this house?” And so went out.

When the door had closed upon her, there was a heavy silence for a while. The baronne, seated at the table, kept her great black eyes fixed upon her husband, waiting for his lead. Cabarus, by the chimney, was warming his hands.

Julian had begun pacing to and fro, a prey to conflicting thoughts. Once or twice he had been on the point of speaking, but had closed his lips dumbly. At last Cabarus, straightening himself, turned round and broke the spell.

“It is a pity, Mr. Chalfont,” he said, in his quiet way, “that you could not wait a little longer. I had actually come back to tell you that, from what I have just heard, the promulgation about *émigré* estates is to be made to-morrow. It is obvious that Marianne had already heard in a general way of the danger menacing our property. Now, this little scene of the watch is proof that she has found out from your own lips the reason of your presence in Paris. It would have been better to leave me

to explain to her myself the new state of affairs, both as it affects you and us."

Julian stopped in his agitated walk, and looked up with a frown of perplexity.

"Indeed, Monsieur le Baron," he said, after a pause, heavily, "all this does seem to require some explanation. It is evident that your daughter firmly believes that I knew all along the true facts in this affair, in which case my presence under your roof would rightly seem to her incomprehensible—ay, as she says, odious! You, at least, know perfectly well that I had not the remotest idea. It is enough to make one's head reel! You, the present owner of the estates—what could have induced you to seek me out? Me whom this edict is to put into possession as against you? I would probably never have heard of it even. But, having actually sought me, why this secret till the eleventh hour? I would be loth, sir, to think that, through all this pleasant intercourse, you were playing a game with me."

"Mr. Chalfont," said Cabarus, looking at him with a grave kindliness in his eyes, "let us talk this over calmly, like the good friends that we have, I trust, become. If this had been a game," he went on, sitting down on the sofa and crossing his legs, "I could claim that I was now playing it with my cards on the table. My cards, as you see, are the lands, the château, the forests, actual deeds of purchase from the Government that was, and so forth. I know yours. They are good proofs of identity, of your descent, the absence of any rival claimant. Meanwhile, I hold the trump, which is actual possession. But no, this was no game. The main issue depends neither on chance nor skill: merely on facts.

The reason for keeping secrecy on one point just for a little while longer, a reason which seems to you so unaccountable, was simple enough for me.

“ If there were any Motte-Herbault living, sooner or later they were bound to hear of the decree. I therefore thought it wise, rather than having for ever the sword of Damocles suspended over my head, to find out for myself. The chances of successfully disputing the claim were small, but still it was worth while making a fight for it, to put in a protest. A big stake. Now I may say from what I was able to find out, that the chances are practically non-existent. As for the slight deceit that was practised on you, though I must admit it was started while I was, so to speak, spying upon enemy land, it was carried out later solely as a means of knowing more of the man to whom I would have to surrender my property—a property I had grown to look upon as a patrimony for my descendants.”

Cabarus paused wistfully, but only for a brief spell. He quickly resumed, looking straight at the young man with a returning smile of friendliness.

“ If it was a deceit, I was looking forward to atone for it all by the announcement I came to make this very day. And it was, that, having found the man whom the new law is to thrust into my place at La Motte-Herbault a most perfect *galant homme*, I would not even put in my protest in court; that I placed full trust in his chivalrous sense to make an equitable adjustment. For I may say that you will find the property in a far more prosperous condition than it was left by your grandsire. But the devil's in it. All the pleasure I anticipated

in the making of this statement has been discounted by the untimely discovery made by my daughter!"

A gleam of admiration had appeared in the baronne's eyes as she listened to her husband's forensic discoursing, and marked the impression it made upon the young man.

"Yes," went on Cabarus, taking a pinch from his gold snuff-box, with a sigh half humorous, half rueful, "it is a pity that she should have forestalled me. I would have made things clear to her—as I think I have made them to you—and she would not have so perversely mistook your attitude."

Julian, who, under a new emotion, had begun again to pace fretfully up and down the room, came back quickly to the speaker.

"My dear baron," he said warmly, "forgive my unfortunate phrase! I was so much upset—I believe I do understand now—and, indeed, my obligation to you is one that will be difficult to repay. But it is not La Motte-Herbault that matters, now—I will thank you later. It is Mar—it is your daughter—she left the room just now, in anger. There was a look, a look almost of contempt in her eyes! That is what troubles me greatly—she little knows how greatly!" said the ingenuous youth, putting his hand distressedly to his forehead.

"But you will, I know, make that right. And yet, Monsieur le Baron, and you, madame," he went on under growing excitement, "I am glad. It forces me to speak. I will confess to you that, just as you were returning, I was about to tell Mademoiselle Marianne that I love her. To tell her of my coming fortune—that was what had emboldened me, little guessing, indeed—to

ask her if she could think of me. I know it is not the custom in your country to speak to the girl first, but I never thought of that then. I meant to speak as I would have spoken in England to one I would ask for a wife. I had no time. And then—well, then came that surprising turn. Now, sir, you who know as much about me and my prospects as any father need, I ask your consent. Madame, I ask you to plead my cause. I—I love her ! ”

Cabarus and his wife had risen, exchanging a smile. Cabarus threw out his arms.

“ Mr. Chalfont,” he began, stopped as one battling with a sudden overpowering emotion, and wrung both the young man’s hands fiercely. Then, in softening accents : “ Know you ! I knew you from the first day ! And every hour, since, has confirmed my first thoughts of you. And this is greater happiness than I ever dared look for. My darling Marianne ! Julian, my son ! Estelle, call in the child.”

The baronne gently shook her head.

“ Let us go carefully,” she said, and smiled reassuringly at Julian to counteract any disconcerting impression the words might convey. “ The dear child must, you remember, have things explained to her. She was, as you saw, in a nervous state. This is too beautiful to risk any more misconstruction. Leave it to me, sir—or let me say also, my son.”

On this last word she came close to him, gently drew his head down between her hands, and kissed him on the forehead.

“ Come back a little later,” she then said. “ Come back to be made happy.”

“ My wife is right,” murmured Cabarus, when she had passed out of the room. “ Women, of

course, understand such matters better than we do. It is well that we should be able to tell Marianne that you are gone but will come back for your answer. Let me see, it is now half-past five. You have time to stroll to the Café du Dauphin, where we were together yesterday, and have your cup of chocolate there—since we are not, after all,” he put in smiling, “to have *gôûter* together to-day—and be back at seven. Seven. Be punctual as you were just now, and this time, I warrant, you will find a happy greeting ! ”

With such genial words did Cabarus dismiss his guest. Once more alone, he flung himself upon the sofa, laughing delightedly. It was a silent laugh, but of perfect, of immense satisfaction. Ten minutes passed ; another ten. He waited, ever and anon hearkening for the sound of footsteps in the direction of his daughter's apartment. He was at last on the point of going in search of her himself, when the baronne came in. At first glance he could see that things were amiss ; her face wore a look of consternation.

“ It is incomprehensible,” she said in answer to his quick look of inquiry.

“ What ? ” he asked, sitting up, with an anxious frown.

“ She will not hear of it. I have told her everything. It is no use.”

He rose with a leap. Cabarus' characteristic placid and easy manner was but a professional accomplishment. A sudden and genuine distress wrung his face.

“ No, no ! ” he said huskily. “ Never say that ! Refuse such a *parti*—such a man ! Our child, our Marianne, throw away such a fortune

—such a fortune! Pass by such a chance! Never!”

Anguish darkened the woman's eyes.

“You know Marianne,” she said despairingly. “Nothing will move her when her pride is up. What the offence is she has taken I cannot make out. But it is deep—oh, deep! She does not love him, that is quite evident. Strange! I should have thought——”

Cabarus had a kind of roar in his throat.

“She would have soon enough learned to love him, and, besides—oh, what maddening ill-luck is this! We must get at the bottom of it!” He strode to the door and threw it open. “Marianne!” he called violently down a passage. Then, in softer tones: “Marianne, dear child!”

With mighty effort, he recovered some kind of composure; and when, a moment later, the girl walked slowly in and stood in front of him with downcast lids, it was very gently that he took her hand and said:

“Marianne, my beloved child, what is this I hear? Do you realise that by refusing Mr. Chalfont's offer, which, by wonderful luck, I have been able to throw in your way, you cast aside our only chance of keeping the fortune which I have built up for you—for you alone—for the sake of the position it would give you in life? Do you not see that, in the new order of things, except as the wife of that man—a charming fellow and fine gentleman—you can now never have La Motte-Herbault? Do you not understand?”

She raised her eyes and looked at him steadily.

“I understand, father, that, as arranged between you and that Mr. Chalfont, I am to be taken over with the estate, since, having come

and seen for himself, he is pleased to be satisfied with my person ; that the marriage is to be the ransom on payment of which the fight which you otherwise, I know, would make to try and retain our property will be forgone. I understand that you, father, in your anxiety to see me well married, and thinking that I would be happy with this man and his fortune, thought it well to agree to such a compact. But that a young man, a *gentilhomme*, should have made such a bargain—ah, *fi donc !* ”

“ Marianne—Marianne ! ” cried Cabarus, in despair, as he realised the plausibility of her unexpected interpretation. “ Will you not believe me when I say that until this hour he never had an idea——”

She interrupted him with a bitter little laugh.

“ Nothing,” she said, “ can ever make me believe that Mr. Chalfont, coming over with you from England to claim our estate for himself, did not know in whose hands this estate was. It is useless, father ; I will not marry this man ! ” Her eyes suddenly flashed. “ If you have any love left for me, never allow him to address another word to me. Let him go. It is monstrous that he should even think of spending another night under the same roof with us. Ah ! ” she cried, and then was seized with shuddering, “ I’d rather die—I’d rather die ! ”

Cabarus gazed at his daughter with a sombre look.

“ Enough—enough ! So be it, then ! You are right ; he must not spend another night under our roof. Go back to your room, child. And I, who thought,” he said, as if to himself, with a savage bitterness, “ that I had thus, so naturally, saved your fortune ! Well, well, it is

not lost yet, for aught we can tell. No, never fear," he added, as she made a quick movement, "Mr. Chalfont shall never address another word to you. I will see to that—I will see to that. Go now, dear child. I must think."

From tender habit, though his thoughts seemed already far away, he kissed her hair ; then gently pushed her out of the room.

"She will never change her mind," he said to his wife, noting the trouble of her looks, "so that avenue is barred. But there are other outlets—plenty. I have lost a deal of valuable time, though. The temptation was great, and it seemed so simple!—To-morrow this promulgation.—Well, to-day is still ours. I must think. Estelle," he went on, "you will have to see Mr. Chalfont when he comes back. Explain discreetly. I know I can trust you. And when I come back to-night," he added, unconsciously baring his teeth, "I may be able to tell you that our Motte-Herbault is not yet lost to our wilful Marianne."

She sprang forward, caught him by the arm with a half-stifled cry of alarm, and drew her face near his.

"Sylvestre, be careful! To-night? What are you going to do to-night?"

He laughed and gave her a sounding kiss on the cheek.

"To-night? Why, I am going as usual to my letter-work. What is the matter with you?"

And on this he left her. He passed into his dressing-room. Though dusk was fast gathering, the curtains were not yet drawn. He glanced for a moment upon the quay: a thick white mist was rising from the river. Although only on the first floor, he could not see the pavement.

Cabarus, standing by the window, erect and motionless, fell into a deep abstraction. Some dark thought it must have been round which his mind worked, for his countenance grew ever sterner. His fixed gaze became concentrated like a hawk's before the dart. At last, with a deep sigh, he roused himself. He looked at his watch with an anxious frown ; it was some twenty minutes to seven.

No time to lose. Now, with quick deliberation, he donned, instead of his usual redingote, a many-caped overcoat ; instead of the curly-brimmed beaver, a deep fur cap—one of the many " Cossack " fashions suggested by the army of occupation. He wrapped his chin and mouth in several folds of a red muffler. These were all precautions, doubtless, against the unpropitious weather of this coming night. Then he gave some thought to the selection of his stick from the varied collection displayed on the rack, and decided that the one with the short dagger would be more suitable than the habitual companion with the long blade.

Then, by the back stairway, he reached the mist-wrapped street, and plunged into its dusk.

IV

THE EVENING OF THE GREAT FOG

THE fog which, in the fall of the year, is apt to rise in Paris upon a turn of the wind along the river-banks has none of the acrid murkiness known to Londoners. It is steam-white. But in its whiteness it can at times be as impenetrable as the blackest night.

Cabarus, sallying forth, was brought to a standstill almost at once by the incredible denseness of the pall ; from one moment to the other he was, as it were, deprived of a sense. But, with the loss of sight, acuity of hearing immediately asserts itself.

On this, no doubt, he reckoned to carry out his purpose, for, after taking to his right a dozen paces or so, which must necessarily bring him to the riverside corner of the house, he remained still, merely hearkening. Anyone coming, as Julian must, if he had indeed repaired to the Café du Dauphin, from the " left bank " of the Seine would proceed either along the quay or through the Rue Poultière. This street of ancient mansions, devoid of shops and lonely at most times, was now absolutely deserted.

Under the mantle of fog, footsteps and all such familiar sounds are apt to be oddly disguised. Muffled at first as by greater distance, they rise

louder, with a deceiving abruptness, as if suddenly close.

The church clock of St. Louis had not yet announced seven, when a tapping of heels on pavement and of stick on wall, faint yet, but unmistakable, reached Cabarus' intent ear from the further end of the street, and suddenly burst into sharpness. It was curiously hurried; indeed, recklessly so, in the circumstances. Nothing but a desperate desire to reach a goal at any risk—fear, or love, or both—could urge such speed in the midst of such blindness. The steps were young, eager. Cabarus breathed deep and set his teeth; drew the dagger, and advanced till his left hand, grasping the empty stick, met the wall. In a few seconds more the sounds of heels and cane were within a yard of him, a darker shadow seemed to leap out of the grey, and the tapping ceased.

"Hallo!" cried an English voice. Then, in the familiar, pleasantly slight English accent, came the words, in French: "If you please, I am right, I suppose, for the Quay d'Anj——"

The word was cut short by an exclamation. Cabarus' dagger had darted and gone home, sure and deep. It was raised again for a further stab, when a random blow met the assailant in the face; not very severe, dealt instinctively at vacancy, but so unexpected as to make him stumble upon the kerb. It was only after two or three reeling steps that he recovered his balance.

Somewhere—he could not now say which side of him—he heard a deep groan, then the soft thud of a body collapsing on the flags. And stillness reigned again as complete as the blinding of the fog pall. He held the dagger safely, but

he had dropped his stick. For a moment he stood there, rigid with thought ; then knelt down and, feverishly, on all-fours, groped about the cobbles, hither and thither, to and fro. It was a long search, but at last his hand met again what might have proved a suspicious testimony.

He rose quickly and took a few cautious steps ; there was nothing to guide him. Presently he met a wall, but he had lost his bearing—right or left side of the street, which was it ? Tapping his way along, even as had his victim not so many minutes before, he went forward in search of the fallen body. After a score of paces he knew he was on the wrong track, and was about to cross the roadway and retrace his steps by the help of the other wall, when he became conscious of approaching footfalls ahead, and, almost immediately, of a vague, reddish glow. He paused, and a minute later, though nothing could be distinguished but a whiter circle on the face of the fog, he knew by the sound of voices that two, at least, or perhaps more, men were moving past him on the opposite side of the street with the help of lanterns.

On tip-toe, from his side he followed the glow. The exchange of words he could hear was trivial enough. But presently there came a cry of surprise and warning ; the moving glow halted. Cabarus stood also, intently listening.

“ He must have fallen and stunned himself on the kerb,” said a voice after a while.

“ No, no ! Fallen ? *Sacrebleu !* ” said another, more raucous, “ it’s assassination ! It’s the knife ! See ? Misery !—a fine young man ! ” There was the clatter of lanterns hastily dropped on the pavement. Then : “ Is he dead ? ” Then another pause.

Cabarus, very straight and still, from the depth of the mist awaited the verdict, which came at last :

“ Dead as Dagobert ! ” For all the triviality of the popular phrase, there was a ring of pity in the voice. “ Thunder, what a dirty stroke to do ! ”

Cabarus heaved a profound sigh. He sheathed the dagger back into its stick, and noiselessly moved away, straight ahead. A faint lapping of waters warned him that he was again on the Quay d'Anjou. He quickly crossed the road, found the parapet, and followed it to his right—he knew his way now—turned upon the bridge, and a couple of hundred paces brought him across the water to the “ town side ” of Paris.

There, with the lighting of shop-fronts and street lamps, progression was easier. Nevertheless, at his first opportunity, Cabarus purchased a lantern. As it was handed to him, lighted, upon the counter : “ You have had a fall already, sir,” said the shopman, with sympathy, pointing to the customer's muddied knees and hands. “ You look the least bit pale still and shaken. Permit me to give you a brush.”

“ Yes, I stumbled upon a chain-post, crossing the quayside just now, and measured my length on the pavement,” said Cabarus carelessly. He felt his jaw, for the first time conscious of the effect of Julian's blow ; then quickly, upon another thought, cast a glance at his hands, to note them, however, free from any signs of blood. “ Thanks ! I think I shall be safe now,” he said as, armed with the lamp, he sallied forth again.

Cabarus that evening was the first in the Black Office. He had already gone through one con-

siderable heap of correspondence, and had begun the sorting of a new one, before his fellow-scrutators put in their appearance for the night's task. The chief greeted each late comer with his customary placid nod, and an indulgent remark.—“ So you have managed to come, after all, M. Lestocq ! ”—“ How is our work getting on now, M. Dutailly ? ” and so forth, pursuing meanwhile his own work with his well-known methodical sedulousness.

He completed his task somewhat earlier than usual. But it was without any sign of haste, with all his habitual grave and courteous deliberation, that he left the company still at work, soon after the striking of twelve.

There was no need for the lantern ; the fog had cleared. A moonless sky shone with myriad stars, and he was able to proceed homeward at a smart pace.

As he set foot on the Pont Marie, something unusual struck him about the night appearance of his house at the other end. Several windows were illumined which at this time, normally, should have been black. The concierge's lodge also showed signs of being awake. But what made Cabarus halt with a jerk was to note that the room in the left wing—in the apartment that had been allotted to his guest—was brilliantly alight, and its window open.

He paused awhile, his hand upon the cold stone parapet, deeply wondering. Then with hastened steps he reached the back entrance, rushed up the stairs, and let himself in.

Of course, after what he had seen, he was fully prepared to find some of the household up. But, for all his strong self-possession, he was struck mute as he opened the dining-room door.

On his entrance, Marianne Cabarus, who had been sitting at the supper-table, still in her day dress, her head between her hands, rose and slowly removed the shade from the lamp. She stood upright, calm ; but her eyes were strangely dilated and dark in her white face as they fixed themselves upon his—not questioning, but reading him through and through.

“ Father,” she said, in an even, ominously quiet voice, “ the young man must live. Nothing that we can do, that you can do—for we have already done what we can, so far—must be spared to keep him in life. You yourself, father, must help to keep him in life.”

Cabarus, bewildered for the first time in his career, perhaps, could only find incoherent words :

“ Die—life ? Dear child, what can——”

“ Father, father,” she interrupted him, and a faint note of pleading tinged the forced calmness of her tone, “ the thing we have to do now is to escape being all murderers. Oh, no ! Do not ! ” she said with an increasing earnestness, as he instinctively made the obvious gesture of shocked and surprised denegation. “ What is the use ? I know. Father, believe me, I understand now as clearly as if I had been with you all along. I knew from the very moment he was brought in.”

“ Brought in ? Who ? Julian Chalfont ? ”

“ Some men found him, in front of the house. They carried the body in—dead, assassinated, they said. But I saw at once he was not yet dead. And now, father, it must not be said that he was—assassinated ! ”

The words seemed to bring back to Cabarus at last the power of reason, and with it his self-

control. Without speaking yet, he removed his cap and cloak, throwing them on the chair.

"Yes," she went on, "I know you have done this for me more even than for yourself."

"But done what, Marianne?" he said at last.

His voice and bearing were admirable. He was the indulgent father soothing his young daughter's nervous terrors, but he was conscious himself that his hand shook a little. She made no answer. Her eye had fallen upon the stick, where it lay upon the table. She took it up, and partly drew out the blade. At sight of the first ruddy patch she hastily thrust the dagger back, giving him a quick, fierce look.

"This!" she said then; and that was her answer. "But if my father becomes a murderer—ah, what of me?" She cast the stick upon the cloak, and made a movement as though to wring her hands, but repressed it. "What of me?" she repeated. "I see it all, I tell you. You never would have done it but for what I had said." Drawing closer to him, and looking eagerly up to his face, "Father," she whispered, "the young man must live, to save you from being the assassin that men spoke of. He must live," she added, faltering a little, "to be my husband! And he must never hear that——"

"That you declared you would rather die? Ah, Marianne, my child, that ferocious pride of yours!"

A smile hovered on his lips; he was his own self again. Perhaps, to his astute judgment, the reflection had come that, follow now what may—knell or marriage bell—the fruits of his labours were not to be lost.

Her answer was to justify his complacent thought.

“No one,” she said, “when it is known, as you must make it known—known at once, father—that he is my affianced husband will ever suspect you. As for me, what has happened has opened my eyes. Oh, I have had time, all these hours since you left, to piece things together. He did speak the truth, and I was mad! He knew nothing, and his love——”

Cabarus, with joy on his face, opened his arms.

“Well spoken, my darling!” he exclaimed, and would have clasped her to his heart. But she drew back and broke into wild sobs.

“I cannot! No, not yet! Oh, father, father, if he were to die!”

“Marianne!” cried Cabarus, startled out of his new-recovered ease. “You? You love the boy? Oh, thousand million devils!” He struck his forehead. “And I did not see through it! Yet I might have guessed. Marianne, he shall live! My God!”—for the first time in his life Cabarus made such a call in appeal. “He must live! Marianne, you shall be happy yet.”

At this moment the inner door opened, and a small, grey-headed man, with bushy eyebrows bending fiercely upon the kindest eyes, entered upon them. Cabarus recognised the eminent surgeon, Dr. Doyen.

“Ah, baron—you are back!” said the newcomer. “And I see by your face you have heard. Well, the lad is unconscious, but I think I can give you some hope.”

“It is really bad, then?”

“Bad? A fearful stab! Ought to have killed him on the spot. He has lost a lot of blood. But he is young, and vigorous as a young bull. He may pull through. I have hopes, I say. My faith, a handsome lad! I

never myself admired an Englishman before, but——”

“ He was to have been my son,” said Cabarus, looking at his daughter.

“ So ? Indeed ? Ah, of course. I understand now ! Mademoiselle,” said the doctor, with his French gallantry, “ do not weep, you who have been so courageous, and so resourceful, to-night. We shall yet see the handsomest couple in the world united at St. Louis’. We shall, mademoiselle, on the faith of Doyen ; we shall pull our young friend through. But these emotions have been too much for you, and no wonder. Even you yourself, baron, look quite upset. There, go and rest, mademoiselle, and trust in youth, and in love and in life—and in old Doyen ! ”

Marianne gave a long, earnest look at her father’s haggard face, in which he might have read a dawning light of forgiveness ; and, without another word, she left the room.

Cabarus, with more eagerness than he was wont to show, seized the doctor by the arm.

“ Now that we are alone—man—is it true, my friend, that the boy may live ? It was not for her sake you said so ? ”

The surgeon looked up.

“ The boy will live, I believe,” he said impressively. And Cabarus gave a great sigh. “ I am going back to the bedside in a moment, to relieve Madame la Baronne. She sent me here to have a morsel of supper, for I must watch all night. My dear baron,” he went on, sitting down before the plate that Cabarus mechanically pushed towards him, “ who, do you think, could have an interest in putting that amiable youth away ? ”

" I cannot conceive," said Cabarus, with every appearance of wonder. " None but ourselves even knew of his engagement to our daughter. Our streets are unsafe, no doubt. Some mad ex-soldier, perhaps, with a Bonapartist hatred of the English. At our very door! Stay, though—the fog—perhaps the blow was intended for me? That would explain! "

" It might," said the doctor, with his mouth full. " You gentlemen of Fouché's company, it is not to be denied you have stirred up a fine swarm of hatreds. But, I'm eating your supper, baron. Sit down! As I said, you do look as if a glass of wine or two would do you good."

V

MR. CHALFONT, OF LA MOTTE-HERBAULT

DAYS and nights, seemingly numberless, were passing over Julian Chalfont as, in his painted room over the river-front, he lay; leaving no remembrance in his slowly returning life but, at first, of some confused struggle for mere existence; then, of a detached inertness, a thankfulness of rest and waning pain; anon of a vaguely soothing expectancy—for he had been told by the unknown, mysterious shadows who ministered to his wants that things were well, as he would hear later if he took patience and waited quietly for his coming strength.

In such guise did time flow past him. The outer world, meanwhile, was piling up within these autumn weeks many stirring records—mainly tragic. France, the whilom Revolutionary, lately the Imperial, now Royal once more and in the fever of blind reaction, was joining that Holy Alliance—holy, save the mark!—which must inevitably make of the Continent ere long a hotbed of revolutions to come. She had shot Ney, “the brave of braves,” she was shooting Labédoyère; she was about to shoot Murat, the epic *beau sabreur*. She was restoring the chain pillory and the branding-iron for those who were not royally convinced; she issued her

daily list of proscriptions and condoned throughout her fair provinces wholesale massacres, Saint Bartholomews of opponents to the restored régime. She established, in short, what was already called the *Terreur Blanche*, rivalling that Red Terror which a quarter-century of accumulating glories had thrown into oblivion. She was "paying back" indeed (as Madame de Chambron had hinted in the letter that was not destined to reach its English address) "the heirs of the Jacobins in their own coin."

All these things followed, naturally, in the trend of that main event, the restoration of the old social order, which through the interference of the Black Office, had boded to affect so radically the fortunes of Julian Chalfont. As for the coming change which more immediately concerned his prospects—the edict of restitution—it was passing through various strange phases, with the oddest turns in its day-to-day elaboration: no one could foresee yet what shape it would ultimately assume. This unexpected course exercised fiercely the minds of those concerned, pro or contra; but the Baron Cabarus was now in a position to await the issue, if with keen interest, at least without undue anxiety.

During the crisis, Fouché himself, the powerful and dangerous Duc d'Otrante, was exiled to some minor and distant embassy. Cabarus, however, as he had boasted, was always in time. Thanks to a display of tact and sagacity, that went even beyond his usual performances, in the utilisation for Government service of epistolary secrets, he found his position actually strengthened. He was safe.

The world, indeed, was going singularly well with him just now. This he realised more parti-

cularly when Dr. Doyen was able to pronounce that his patient—although still forbidden to speak—could be allowed to receive now and again a short visit from his hosts.

“ It will give him a fillip,” opined the surgeon, “ upon which I put faith to set him onward. There seems to be a kind of anxiety on his mind, the nature of which is not very difficult to guess, and which the sight of you will, I know, set at rest.”

It was on the tenth day after the foggy adventure that this welcome announcement was made, one of those balmy days which “ St. Martin’s Summer ” seems to vouchsafe Paris with especial blandness.

The patient’s bed was wheeled close to the window, for Dr. Doyen was one of those clearer adepts who believed in God’s sunshine and fresh air as the best adjuvants to human medicine. Through the wide casement the sun, descending in the south-west, poured into the room those autumn rays which, as the French phrase has it, “ warm but never burn, and cheer without blinding.”

Against the primrose sky, the distant view—edged lace-like with the soaring spires and the vane-crowned church towers, the nobly-rising slate crests of riverside palaces, the tall, blue-smoking roofs of old Paris—was powdered as with golden dust.

Inside there reigned a soothing quietude. The hum of the town came in but faintly across the bright ribbon of river, for the quay of the Île Saint Louis itself is, even at the height of the day’s life, a singularly silent place.

Cabarus and his wife, ushered in by the doctor, entered almost instinctively upon their lightest

tread. At the sound of the opening door, the patient, who was dreamily staring at the pastoral scenes of the painted ceiling, brought his eyes down; and a smile flickered upon his white, emaciated face.

“Not one word, remember,” warned the doctor again, with his mock-fierce air. “You may listen and look and nod, but no talk!”

Whilst the visitors, seated by the bed, were discoursing in kindly tones, but in the broken disjointed way which a one-sided talk must inevitably follow, Julian’s glances ever and anon moved restlessly from their faces back to the door, with a look of expectancy disappointed. At last he seemed to give up the hope, and lay back again, staring with listless desolation at the eternal *bergerie* limned in fading colours over his head.

When, after the few minutes that were considered long enough for a first visit, they rose to go, and Cabarus stooped to press affectionately the inert, diaphanous hand lying on the sheet, the young man made a sudden movement, petulant like a child; pushed the pressure aside, and, half rising on his elbow, as if in spite of himself, broke the solemn promise made to the surgeon.

“Marianne?” he said.

He thought to speak in a loud voice, but it came as the hissing whisper of the man sleep-talking.

A colour mounted to his face, and his eyes were wide and bright with anxious earnestness. Both Cabarus and his wife turned a quick look upon the doctor, who, after smilingly shaking a finger of rebuke at the youth, and pondering a moment, answered:

"Well—yes—perhaps. Just to say *bonjour*, and not one word more. It will do him good. Stay—I will fetch her myself."

With a sigh, Julian sank back on his pillow and closed his eyes.

When, a few minutes later, the girl entered, the devouringly inquiring gaze which he fixed upon her was illumined by a light of joy as she slowly approached the bed. What he saw in her face told him all he yearned to know. Feebly he raised his arms as if to receive her in them. She took his hands in hers and kissed him softly on both his sunken cheeks.

"Be patient," she said, in a voice scarce above a murmur, "and of good hope, my betrothed."

She smoothed his pillow, smiling tenderly on him, but without another word. Then, at a sign from the doctor, the patient was left alone.

From that day forth, the improvement forecast by the surgeon set in apace. Freer intercourse, and conversation on a less grudging scale, was tolerated.

"It is now," said Doyen, "merely a case of good generous fare, a diet of bouillon and poularde, rising to cutlet and burgundy, for the body. And for the soul, of happy dreaming—which Mademoiselle Marianne's visits will foster. And in another month, faith of Doyen, we will have him on foot, and perhaps even think of putting up the banns, eh, eh? But, meanwhile, peace of mind, my dear baron, is essential. No worries, no business. Happy thoughts are subtle healers, which, alas! it is not in the physician's power to dispense."

And thus the days, passing into weeks, flowed on, filling the old house of Saint Louis with an

atmosphere of quiet satisfaction such as, it may be surmised, that ancient pile had never known at any time of its history. For Julian, they were fraught with a sweetness that grew with his waxing strength into a haunting of joy.

Throughout the intercourse, however, between hosts and guest, there lurked a kind of shyness on all sides about returning to the question of La Motte-Herbault: that question which had so singularly brought the dweller in Lyon's Inn from distant London to be the guest of Cabarus on the banks of the Seine. The baron, it was understood, was watching the progress of affairs; that was sufficient for Julian. The real presentment of his hopes was in flesh and blood, close to him, in the house. It spoke to him in the most harmonious voice surely that ever vibrated in young man's ear. It looked fairly into his eyes with such radiant promise as made all the rest of human prospects colourless, tasteless, scentless—things of no account.

On his side, Cabarus, mindful of the doctor's recommendation, was content to put off the discussion which, now, to look at it in its true light, was resolving itself into one of marriage settlements. But the hour came at last when it had to be brought forward.

Though not allowed yet to leave his apartments, Julian, for a few hours, every day, was up and dressed. Indeed, he was now distinctly sedulous in the matter of attire. His apparel might sit a little more loosely on his thinned frame than the fashionable Bond Street tailor had originally intended; but he was, if anything, with the alabaster, clear face and the darkened eyes of convalescence, a more attractive personation of the romantic lover than upon his

first appearance in all the lustiness of youthful strength.

So Cabarus and the doctor seemed to think that afternoon as, leaning back against the baluster of the window, they gazed, benevolently quizzical, into the room where the betrothed, seated side by side at the table, were conversing under their voice and with delighted earnestness upon nothings of special importance, and ever and anon looking together at the pages of an album that lay between them.

"Yes," said the doctor, at last, to his friend ; "since you think it is becoming urgent, I will allow you to have a little business talk to-day. Besides, I cannot believe, knowing how much at heart you have the happiness of those young people, that it will be very formidable. So I will now leave you to it."

"You are looking, I see," said Cabarus, a little while later, addressing the lovers, who seemed to have forgotten his presence, just as they had failed to notice the doctor's departure, "at those sketches of La Motte-Herbault. Charming château, is it not, Julian ?" He smiled shrewdly at the young man. "At least, I am certain you think it so, as displayed in Marianne's drawing.

"It seems a good opportunity," he went on, dragging a chair near and sitting astride it in front of them, "to have a little talk for once about this same Motte-Herbault. What say you ? It was only natural that I should not risk tiring you by speaking of it ; but even you never breathed a word, never an inquiry. One would think you had lost all interest. Are you not anxious to hear how the whole thing is getting on ?"

Marianne had an unconscious frown of anxiety. Julian had flushed a little.

"Truth to tell, baron," he said hesitatingly, "La Motte-Herbault, ever since—ever since I learned whom it was I would have to dispossess—has meant in my thoughts only one thing—I mean Marianne. Now that I know that my coming into the estate would not spell for me the loss of Marianne, nor the loss to Marianne of her fortune, somehow—well; it seems as if the whole question were settled. But you alarm me!"

Cabarus's smile became broader.

"Now," he said jovially, "that pleases me. That simplifies the telling of the odd news I have for you. There, there, young man, do not look so terribly anxious! The question is indeed settled, although not at all in the manner which you—or, for that matter, I myself—anticipated."

In spite of the assurance, dismay had now chased all colour from Julian's face. Instinctively, he reached for the girl's hand, and retained it in his with a jealous clutch.

"Is there, then, any—is there a flaw?" he began, stammering. "Oh," he went on, rising to his feet, grey consternation on his face, "do not tell me that, after all, I am not to have this which alone has made me bold to ask Marianne!"

A kindly light brightened Cabarus' eyes. With a friendly pressure, he forced the young man back into his chair.

"Julian, my son, take Marianne's hand in yours again. You will be able then the more easily to believe that my news brings nothing of misfortune to you—to either of you. I need not speak of myself: your words might have

come out of my very mouth. Does not this Motte-Herbault, for me, simply mean my Marianne's dower in life? Flaw, say you? No; I see I had best be to the point at once. In brief, then, the whole scheme of land restoration has vanished in smoke; it was officially dropped to-day. Something will be done, no doubt, about Church property; but—we may as well have it out finally—the reinstating of *émigrés*, even by Royal edict, is proved to be unworkable. Fouché was in the right of it. Ah, my dear young man, there will be to-day, when the *Moniteur du Royaume* is scanned, a deal of fury in many quarters, and a corresponding relief in others. But for us, now—for you—it means nothing.”

“It means, though,” said Julian, still ruefully, though somewhat calmed in his distress by the pressure of Marianne's hand, “that, instead of château and forests and lands to bring to my bride, I come to her the lord of a couple of dismal rooms in an old London Inn, and, at the best of my prospects, of a few thousand francs a year.”

“Bah—bah! Never let the unimportant trouble your life when you secure what really counts. You cannot bring, as you thought to do, La Motte-Herbault to your wife. Well, she brings it to her husband. What difference will that mean to you this day month, or thereabouts, when—— Ah! Estelle!”

The door had opened, and the baronne stood on the threshold, hesitating a moment. There was a look of anxious inquiry upon her face.

“Come in—come in!” cried Cabarus. “I know; Doyen has told you not to let his precious patient confabulate too long—*parbleu*, not more

precious than to me ! But it is all out already, and no harm done."

A smile of relief lighted the mother's beautiful face. Without a word, she came in and sat down with the group, listening. Cabarus was all geniality.

"Who could have foreseen," he said, as if to himself, as he took an elaborate pinch of snuff—"who could have foreseen, seeing the merry rate at which these people were restoring the country to the tunes of the good old times, that their land scheme would crumble down in this way ? And, above all, who could have foreseen the result of that journey of mine to England—a timely precaution, nothing more, as I thought ? But I do not regret it. *Diantre*, no ; that I do not ! Nor you, either, I will warrant," he said, turning again to Julian. "But for that intrusion of mine on your boxing bout, in those little rooms of yours up the funny stairs, you would never even have had a chance of seeing that ancestral estate, Monsieur Chalfont de la Motte-Herbault. For, by the way, that is the name you must assume when re-entering, after the lapse of one generation, upon the property. There will have been one instance, after all, in spite of the collapsed edict, of an *émigré* estate returning to a natural heir. Well, for all that it brought you such a deep taste of cold steel, and so narrow an escape of assassination, will you say that it was not for the best that I went to seek you ? "

"The only thought I had," said Julian dreamily, "for I really believed that ruffian in the fur cap had done for me, was that I was losing Marianne on the very threshold of my joy. But for that fog," he said, looking up at the girl

as if to vindicate himself, "I could have made a fight for it. It was a surprise. But," he added, with a sudden boyish glee that spoke volumes for his returning strength, "I really think I left my mark on him, though.—You remember, baron, the hit which the boxer fellow was trying to teach me? Well, it came out then, as if by instinct. I think it must have sent him about his business, since I was not plundered, after all."

"Ah!" said Cabarus, in a musing tone, unconsciously fingering his chin, "let us bless that boxing. And as for the fog—why, let us bless it, also!—But for that fog," he added, looking gravely at his daughter, "the wretch Julian sent spinning would not have left him with his life that night! . . . And where, then, would all our happiness have flown to?"

II

THE RED KILNS OF AMBLEMONT

I

A DISCREET CRUISE

WHY should I have made up my mind that this would be my last adventure of daring I cannot recall. I don't believe in presentiments—even now. I certainly did not then ; although the turn of affairs might well have served to justify a faith in that kind of feeling. At any rate, it being seemingly settled in my own mind that after this expedition I would rest upon my gains and retire from the risky trade, I had resolved to do it on as large a scale as possible and to crown my work by a brilliant last stroke.

The times were more than ever propitious. Our correspondent's report was that now many private individuals were taking up the business over in France, at twenty-eight shillings—thirty-three francs in *écus*, or thirty-five in the new Royal Bank of France notes issued by the returned Bourbons. In fact, I was offered a market for some thirty-two thousand pounds, if all could be settled before the end of May. There was no difficulty in getting the promise of the sum—short as was the time—from those few houses in the secret. I believe I could have trebled the figure, had the equivalent been coming forward from the other side. But, then, I was the only man that could be trusted with

such an amount. There was not another Christopher Oldford—nor ever had been.

A secret shared by more than two is no longer a secret : a truism, no doubt, but one which may explain the failure of so many guinea-smugglers in that year. I had kept to my own usual methods. As far as could humanly be known, none but myself and the Manager of the Bank (it would not be fair, even after this lapse of time, to mention the name) had wind of the venture ; I speak, of course, of this side. As for the dealers across the water, I had the affair cut and dried with them. There were only four ; each for his syndicate, but acting together. We had not met, thus far ; but safe men I knew them to be, on the word of friends I could trust ; and, anyhow, each with too big an interest at stake to let the matter go wrong.

I was over-well acquainted, by this time, with the pitfalls of the Preventive Service to have anything to do with the South and East Coast. A Salford schooner, rigged out as a pleasure yacht, was waiting for me at Teignmouth with four first-class hands (by no means unacquainted, as I was well aware, with cargo-running of a lesser kind) engaged at rates which no doubt gave each man food for reflection. That kind of man, however, is not only discreet but venturesome by training and habit. Nevertheless I am certain—again humanly speaking—they had no real inkling of the kind of cargo they were to ferry across.

On May 17th, from early morn, there was much storing of luggage and provisions ; much rowing to and fro in Teignmouth waters. And, under the nose of a jovial preventive officer

(who obviously lacked the experience of his Kentish and Sussex brethren), something over five hundredweight of good English sovereigns, neatly packed in skin belts of one thousand each, were transferred to my cabin.

By ten we were on our way, ostensibly a due east course, with a fair north-easter, none too fresh, calculated to bring us off the French coast somewhere about ten of the night—a new-moon night, as suits such discreet expeditions. Before noon, after a quiet spell of work in the retirement of my cabin, the belts had left the lining of my multitudinous trunks and were reposing secretly, like so many dried eels, under certain boards of the floor. Then I came on deck. Land was out of sight. I now gave out the course as south-east; and, as I did so, I could see two of my fellows exchange a knowing wink. They had known well enough we were not bound for Wight as I had announced.

The men were in cheerful mood, evidently enjoying the humour of the free rig-out which had transformed them, plausible and self-reliant rascals, into smart yacht hands. All was going to admiration. If my crew was in jovial strain at the thought of twenty guineas a head for a night's trip, I was in a positively rarefied state of confidence and self-congratulation. The most difficult part of the task was already accomplished—that is, the collecting, the stowing away of the gold; and, above all, its safe exit from home waters. In another twelve hours we should be turning north again—a monstrous profit of over twelve thousand pounds in my pocket-book, and no risk on the homeward way.

I fell, as it were, to licking the chops of anticipation; within three days the principal returned

to the lenders, with a surplus for them of six thousand—less the discount of course on French paper, but that was their affair. For myself, the balance of five on the same terms. . . . Wonderful trade! . . . And who but Christopher Oldford, the daring—above all, the lucky—who but the trusted Christopher Oldford could turn money over honestly at that rate in forty-eight hours? Never a failure yet! More than the petty guinea-runners of Dover or Hastings could boast . . . aye—but in my trade one failure spelt ruin! And, after this, yes, I would retire on my fortunes.

As I paced the deck, the schooner slipped along like a live thing, on the very best point of wind. By sundown—we had had better running even than I expected—the high plateau of the Cotentin was already rising in the south. To avoid observation we headed up Channel again till full darkness, then tacked south-west: this time with all lights out.

Before ten, pitch-dark, we rounded the Cape. And there, sure enough, some three miles ahead, were my two fiery points on the crest of the cliff to the left of Amblemont: the lime-kilns on the barren chalky fields, in full glow, kept red-hot by the never-failing breeze of the heights. Could more unmistakable beacon have been devised to guide a landward course on an unlighted coast? It had been my own discovery, and I had used it many a time—though, of course, never twice with the same crew. All was well.

Yet, somehow, as I now gazed on the steady red eyes that met mine out of the blackness from

afar, the elation I had known during our merry run across, suddenly left me. Why they should have struck me chill, with an indefinable yet so poignant impression, is one of those matters not to be explained. I certainly suspected nothing, yet an odd sense of anxiety seized me. That the dull anguish I associate, to this day, with the whole of the night's work is not a mere trick of memory caused by after-knowledge, is proved by the fact that I had to leave the helmsman, over whom I was standing, to go back to the cabin for a draught of brandy. After which, although I was myself once more—at least in resoluteness—I still found my usual cheery self-reliance a vanished quantity. In its place there was determination, backed by a mistrustful alertness : something very different.

When I came out, I called the men together.

“ In three hours or so, lads, our job here should be over. All going well, we shall be back in England before night to-morrow. Now listen. This is not the usual business. I need not be more precise. There will be scant trouble about landing at home. The work is here. It's here, to-night. But, even here, I have no reason to anticipate trouble—so you but keep a close mouth and wide-open eyes and ears, the lot of you. You understand? That is your part of the business. You, Dunn, Cattermole, and Woolman, stop aboard and run short tacks, keeping those two red lights on your beam, three or four cable-lengths clear of the surf. A constant lookout for the dinghy, and stand by to sheer off at any time.—No one allowed on board until you hear my voice.”

I paused, to drive home the importance of this order.

"Aye, sir!" The reply rang out briskly. My sombre fit had not reached their spirits.

"You, Curtiss," I went on, "will row me ashore. I'll take the tiller. You'll have to wade to lug her up. On the beach you'll wait for my return. It may be an hour, it may be two, it may be more. When I come back, I will have four gentlemen with me. You will not stir till I hail. Further instructions later. Understood, everyone?"

"Aye, sir, understood."

The men were to be trusted, I knew that. We were then, as far as could be judged from the appearance of the sinister red eyes above, something like half a mile from the cliff.

I passed once more into the cabin to take up my usual paraphernalia. As usual, also, I slipped into my overcoat pockets a pair of double-barrelled pistols, freshly primed: Mantons, with powerful springs that had never yet allowed a flint to miss fire. True, on an errand like mine, it would have been nothing short of disaster to have to use them; but, in strait circumstances, when so big a stake is in play, the disposal of human obstacles by the crooking of a finger is a precious, sometimes indeed your only solution.

II

THE FIRE-WATCHER'S HOUSE ON THE CLIFF

WITHIN half an hour, the dinghy's keel grated on the sandy beach, and I landed in Amblemont cove. I leaped ashore, with the help of Curtiss's shoulders (the surf was nothing to trouble about); then took my solitary way.

At the foot of the cliff, the tinkling of my repeater proclaimed that it was half after ten. Excellent time. Before engaging on the steep rocky lane which, through a cleft, leads upwards, I gave a last look back.—Not the faintest light on board. Just the suggestion of lightness on the black of the waters: the sails of the quietly cruising yacht barely distinguishable. And now I ascended the chalky road, visibly white, even under a starless sky.

All was silent, save for the dismal howling of a dog, far away. Through that silence I unconsciously inclined to walk tip-toe, thinking deeply and (in a way new to me) unpleasantly. My mind lagged behind in the cabin, where, between precarious planks, lay floating such a mass of responsibility—the fortunes of so many besides mine: and with them my good name, my whole prospects! . . . Yes, God willing, this would be the last venture! . . . The howling of that dog, fitful between the pauses of the breeze, was

lugubrious. My own stumbling, in the darker bends of the road, startled me. And I asked myself, Why should the sight of the red lime kiln-holes—eyeslike—have been so disturbing? They had never produced that impression on me before.

Suddenly, another sound, indescribable through the deadening of distance, smote my ear, and with fresh dismay. It might be the death-cry of some trapped animal—or the answering howl of some watch-dog—or perhaps the warning yell of a watcher on the look-out for me. My brooding wits were instantly brought back on the alert.

As the top of the cliff was reached, the wind blew keener. I had to jam my beaver firmly on my head. Of a sudden the two kilns, huge and red, burst again into sight. The place of tryst was behind them, inland: the fire-watcher's house, only habitation for many a furlong. The mighty furnaces, glowing deep at the base, lambent blue at the top, were roaring dully in their solitude. As I approached, I noted a curious change in one of them. Its lambent blue had gradually merged into a lurid yellow. And even as I made my way past, a shift of the wind brought a blast of the fumes across my path: with it an indescribable odour. I had never known the like! It penetrated my whole being, clinging to nostrils, mouth, and throat.—Faugh!

A revulsion was upon me; something like anger—at least an eagerness to hurry through the work as quickly as I might, and have done with it! Thus it was in an almost bullying mood that I strode towards the door of the mean, low-roofed house of the fire-keeper. The shutters—strong shutters are required on that windy

height—were closed, of course ; but through chinks peered a ray here and there. And there came to me the mutter of voices within. After a rather long pause, during which the subdued talking fell into absolute silence, my peremptory knock was answered by the brusque opening of the door which led straightway into the single ground-floor chamber. I knew it well already : part kitchen, part living-room.

Within the threshold stood a very tall man of middle age. He struck me as of half-pay military appearance, with his tight-buttoned *redingote* and bristly moustache.

At a table, on which were strewn some papers, ink bottles and pens, sat two others whose appearance was more distinctly of the wealthy *bourgeois* type—close-shaven faces with cheek-bone whiskers, ample stocks. Without having seen them before, I could almost put each name to its owner.

“ Milor ? ” said the obvious retired soldier, keeping very straight but with a gleam in his eye that rasped my temper.

“ M. le Baron Cassart, I assume ? ” answered I shortly, stopping any attempt at facetiousness by a display of pure, clipping French.

“ Effectively !—Thirty-one thousand eight hundred and thirty pounds sterling,” he returned, coming to business at once.

That was the credential agreed upon in our correspondence : the figure of the syndicate's venture in answer to the name. I entered and closed the door. Two others who sat at a table had risen and returned bows to my salutation, but with an awkwardness I could hardly have expected in Frenchmen. My haughty English manner, no doubt, put them out of countenance.

I thought it advisable to put more urbanity into my tone—though the abominable taste of the lime-burning was still angry on my palate. I looked at one of them as I said :

“ Monsieur Lebailly, de Caen ? ”

They exchanged a glance and both cleared their throat. Then the other said :

“ It is I, sir.”

“ Thanks, and therefore,” turning again to the first, “ Monsieur Motteron, de la Ferté-Champeau.—But I expected a fourth, Monsieur de Bauché ? ”

The answer came from behind me.

“ Yes. Monsieur de Bauché. He will be back here in a moment.” It was the Baron Cassart, still standing by the door, who spoke. The man had a sardonic grin that perpetually bared the eye teeth. Obviously his natural expression, yet it kept alive in me the temper I was trying to subdue. “ To while away the waiting,” the giant went on, “ he said he’d go and look at the kilns.—Never seen one before ! ”

“ I trust,” I protested, “ he will not keep us waiting long. There is a stench about these same kilns that is unbearable.”

I sat down at the table and pulled out my pocket-book. An uncomfortable silence fell upon the room—in my mood, indeed, I might have called it sinister, though there could be nought but truly commonplace about this set of *agioteurs*. I broke it by some perfunctory talk.

“ You have,” I said, “ made already sure, of course, that we are alone here.—The fire-watcher is away ? ”

Again there was a clearing of throats ; the two at the table looked to the Baron, who now

came and smilingly sat down, remarking in his special phraseology :

" Effectively !—We have seen to the fire-watcher. We shall not be troubled. No.—Ah, here comes our friend."

Even as he spoke, there was a fumbling at the door, and the last representative of the syndicate entered. All eyes were turned on him. From the threshold he gave a peculiar flourish of the hand—a kind of airy and agreeable assurance to his partners in answer to a mute inquiry. Immediately the eyes were turned back on me.

Of a truth my company was strangely distasteful. If I had disliked the Baron of the military bearing, I resented the newcomer with instant detestation. A short, curiously deep-chested, man with a grey, lean face under a sweep of black hair : a wig of the latest mode. Indeed his whole dress heralded an aspiration to dandyism, which an uneasiness of manner rendered quite unconvincing—though, no doubt, in French provincial circles he may have passed for an agreeable buck.

" Faith," he remarked, in an odd sour voice that alone might have sufficed to damn him, " I seem, after all, to have kept the company waiting ! *Pardon ! Excuse !* "

His superfine green spencer and fawn cossack-pantaloons were soiled with chalk and earth. He marked the direction of my eyes and went on :

" My word, I should have done better to wait here . . . though these lime-ovens are a sight, on a dark night—I had a fall over the stones ! " He beat the dust off with his hands in a careless manner. " *Pardon ! Excuse !* " he said again, and sat down, looking at me with his insufferable smile. " To our affairs ! "

"Yes," I said, and in a tone that was meant to convey my purpose of going through business in a strict business way.

"Monsieur de Bauché?" I went on.

"Three hundred and twelve thousand five hundred and fifty francs, as you know, is my share," he briskly answered and clapped a bundle of papers on the table.

"Very well, Monsieur de Bauché. Now pray, gentlemen, let us get through as quick as possible. One of you will no doubt be good enough to see to the safe locking of the doors."

When this was done and we were all seated again round the table, three on the bench, two on chairs, I drew the candles near me.

"Will you, Monsieur de Bauché, begin?" I asked, and snuffed the wicks for a better light whilst he spread his bank-notes. "No, if you please, for the sake of method, my letter first."

Smilingly he handed it. I glanced it through: over my adopted business signature and paraph were detailed, first the undertaking on my part to supply eight thousand nine hundred and thirty sovereigns at the rate of thirty-five francs in the Royal Bank of France notes; and thereafter the full directions concerning the procedure to be followed on our meeting, except, of course, the actual date and rendezvous, which was always communicated separately as the time drew near. The letter was correct. I placed it on one side under the candlestick.

"Here is yours," I said, selecting from my pocket-book. "Do me the favour to examine."

But with an exaggeratedly noble gesture he waived the precaution, and his letter rejoined mine under the candlestick.

"Now for the notes, if you please."

He pushed a bundle across the table. I began counting: a tedious business, but necessary. They were mostly in thousand francs, but there were not a few ten thousands. The process took time—all the more as I examined each note with methodical care: first transparently in front of the candle, and then with a lens. With my long experience I could at once have detected any forgery. But all were good Royal Bank of France notes.

In twenty minutes Monsieur de Bauché's bundle was approved. It was placed in an envelope, which was forthwith docketed with name and amount and closely sealed with my own signet ring.

From the moment that the actual transaction had begun, I had recovered something of my normal self-possession. Indeed, after a time, the work, which required unremitting attention, absorbed me wholly. As I threw the first sealed packet in the middle of the table I looked round. The Frenchmen were sitting in complete silence, looking at me with—as I now thought—rather stupid eyes. No doubt the business which kept me so keen was wearying to watch. Meeting the Baron's gaze, I addressed him in my politest tone:

"Now, sir, shall we proceed, you and I?"

Without a word he handed his letter; glanced at his own that I held out to him, and pushed forward his bundle. And the work of counting and scanning of notes began afresh, to be concluded by the sealing, as before. They seemed to take little interest in the matter; in fact, they began to look openly bored. Amid much yawning and shuffling of feet, but no talk,

nearly another hour went by before the remaining contributions could be passed.

I then got up and stretched myself. Immediately there was alacrity. A general rising. I pointed to the little pile of envelopes.

"The first part of our transaction is clear. Now, with your permission, I assume that I may destroy these mutual letters?"

Monsieur de Bauché, of the abhorrent ingratiating manner, smirked out:

"But why, of course! Certainly." And as he helped me to burn them at the candle flame, "What next, monsieur?" He smiled. "Shall we——" He made a movement towards the notes, but I stopped him.

"One moment, please.—There stand Monsieur de Bauché's three hundred and twelve thousand five hundred and fifty francs, against eight thousand nine hundred and thirty English sovereigns—Monsieur le Baron Cassart's three hundred thousand, against eight thousand five hundred and seventy-two—Monsieur Lebailly's two hundred and seventy thousand francs, against seven thousand seven hundred and forty-six—and lastly Monsieur Motteron's two hundred and twenty thousand, against six thousand five hundred and eighty-two.—In short, one million one hundred and two thousand five hundred and fifty francs in Bank of France notes, against thirty one thousand eight hundred and thirty pounds to come in English gold."

As I said this, I looked from one to the other, and could note the heightened gleam that came into the French eyes at the words: English gold. There was a movement of eagerness towards the table.

"One moment more, if you please. We must

proceed in the accepted regular manner," I said quietly and firmly—and began inserting the envelopes into my pocket-book: which, further, to their obvious astonishment, I locked with a key detached from my fob.

There was a transient menacing frown on the face of Cassart; a quick exchange of looks between him and Bauché, as if asking for direction. But the flicker of hostility died with suddenness when I threw back the case on the table and went on:

"So far, so good. I have the various sums just mentioned ready for you on board. The telling will not be so tedious. As, of course, you have your own ready-made reckoning of the weights and your own scales, it won't take long."

I looked at my watch.

"Past midnight, *messieurs*! Well, in another hour this great transaction will be completed. We shall open this again, presently, in my cabin. But meanwhile which of you, have you settled, shall take charge of the co-operative packet? Unlike the gold of *tout à l'heure*, it can lightly be carried by one man."

I gave the pocket-book a turn with the end of my stick, and assumed a new lightness of manner—from sheer reaction after the heavy silent attentiveness of my long hour's work.

They, evidently, had not settled it among themselves. There was a mute, uncertain consultation of glances. But the matter was decisively clenched by M. de Bauché, who picked up the case and buttoned it in his breast-pocket with a smirk and his inevitable,

"*Pardon—excuse!—By your leave!*"

On Cassart's face there was a twist of anger, which Bauché met, and oddly quelled, with one

steady look. Then ensued a general putting on of great-coats and taking up of bags. The doors were unfastened. We sallied forth.

The night sky was now clear of clouds and glistening with stars. Faint as was their light, it made the white ground about the house visible for a fair distance. We went the round, at my suggestion, to make sure that all was solitary.

The wind had slightly abated (as it often does on the heights at the turn of the morn); but I took note, with a sense of comfort, that there was no chance of its failing me for a swift departure, as soon as I had rid me of my companions. In the distance a dog barked. It was an honest bark; the uncanny howling, at which I had been so strangely concerned, had ceased. Yet, oddly enough, all the depressing doubts, which had left me while at work in the house, crowded on me again as we came in view of the kilns. They glowed more dully; the subdued roar of an hour ago was only a kind of murmur. And I marked—for these fiery towers had a kind of fascination for my eyes—that both were now equally crowned with the flax-blue flame.

III

THE AFFAIR ON THE BEACH

UNDER the starlight, walking at some kind of speed was an easier task than it had proved two hours before. For some considerable time we swung along in silence. Bauché kept close to me on the left. On the right, but a pace behind, stalked Cassart. I resented his tall presence on my heels. The two others lagged a few yards in rear—and, from a certain periodical irregularity in their footsteps, I surmised that, although there was nothing to justify anxiety, they were yet keeping watch behind them.

At length this silent marching, guarded as it were like a prisoner by four men whose personality was so inexplicably antipathetic, grew irritating beyond endurance. I had to make some kind of conversation.

“ You will find the climb back heavy work, Monsieur de Bauché, when your valises are full.—Yours, by the way, will be the highest of the four *in avoirdu pois*, as we say in English.”

“ Bast ! ” the hideous voice came, with its attempt at airiness. “ One does not feel the weight of gold ! ”

But, from behind, Cassart put in his unaccountably vulgar trick of speech.

“ Effectively !—Besides, we none of us are

weaklings.—But how quite remarkably Monsieur the Englishman speaks French!—Astonishing!”

I made no reply for some moments. I was pursuing a newly disturbing idea. This load of gold—Bauché's, I remembered, would weigh close upon a hundred and forty pounds—quite beyond what one man could carry any distance, let alone up a cliff, unaided. . . . The other men's burdens were somewhat less, but even then too much for any but athletic strength. Yet they had made none of the usual provisions for transport. . . . How was that? Then the thought returned, obtrusive now, that had already once or twice flitted through my mind—how singular that these men, belonging, as they must, to a superior class of society, men of wealth and position, should all have such insufferably plebeian voices and modes of speech! At the next remark I pricked up the ear of fresh attention. It was Bauché again.

“Yes—my faith!—it must have been a devil's business to bring this heap of shiners across the sea! Not so simple as collecting the flimsies!” I could hear him slap the bulging pocket-book on his breast. “Now, I wonder, how many men may Monsieur have with him, in the secret of his rose-pot?”

So alert a bird is dawning suspicion that it takes flight at the first glint or sound. But here, in truth, was more than a glint. Here was a clumsy revelation. It awakened me on the spot to hitherto unconsidered possibilities. And, almost at the same moment (as if to resolve any possible doubt about the sinister character of the company I had fallen in) there came from behind me, following upon the sound of a stumble in the dark, a muffled blaspheming oath. It

was instantly repressed, but unmistakable—unmistakable, that is, to one whose knowledge of French was as peculiar and extensive as mine. They were words of convict slang, such as no man ever could use who had not learnt it in the chains of a French *bagne* !

At once all the fleeting vague surprise at the appearance and manner of these men, so unlike, everyone of them, my correspondents of previous enterprises ; all the repeated shocks of dislike determinedly suppressed, came back upon me with overwhelming illumination. What sort of a mistake—good God !—had I made this time ? Suspicion turned, at one leap, into conviction. Here was afoot something utterly wrong ! A kind of nightmare grip seized my heart. . . . That huge stake, confided to my skill and honour ! Yonder it stood, unguarded, upon the waters. . . . And here was I, who alone could safeguard it—aye, and the lives of my unsuspecting hands on board !—groping in the dark on a foreign strand, close surrounded by four as unmistakable ruffians as eyes could set upon. . . .

At critical instants of life there comes sometimes a power of second sight. In these few words I read the whole scheme of menace to the treasure on board.—But I must gain time and think. I made answer at last, as if suspicion were the last thing in my mind—pulling back, as I spoke, the safety-catch of the pistols in my pocket.

“ How many men have I aboard ?—Oh, only four.—And, what did you say : in the secret ? Why, no, monsieur ! I never take anyone into my secret. Only you four gentlemen and I have any knowledge of what is waiting us on board. By the way—I trust to your discretion,

if any of you is acquainted with English, eh ? Not a word to the crew, of course ! ”

My rambling remarks called a laughing answer from behind.

“ Oh, no—never a word ! And in English ! *Oh, la, la*—we others, in English !—That’s a good one ! ”

I believe my voice was a little husky with emotion. My thoughts were galloping far ahead, seeking for an exit. . . . This expedition, as far as profit was concerned, had failed : that was clear. . . . But no lasting harm done yet, if only I could but push off in time and leave these all too suspicious companions behind.

We had reached the foot of the cliff, and the low roar of the rollers was all around us. I had made up my mind.

“ Very well, gentlemen. Then let me guide you,” I resumed with all the steadiness I could command.

Then I called out :

“ Curtiss ! ”

Immediately there sprang the sound of my man’s sudden rising in the boat ; of his ready :

“ Aye, sir. Here ! ”

Still closely surrounded, I advanced towards the spot ; and when some twenty feet away, I stopped and called again (I had to risk something and trust that, in truth, none of them had a word of English) :

“ Curtiss, keep your weather eye open ! Things are amiss here—damned amiss ! Get the boat-hook handy.”

There was a pause. It seemed to me as if I could hear the man thinking. Then came the answer, in quite another tone.

“ Aye, sir, handy. You can reckon on it, sir ! ”

I never in my life loved the sound of quiet, manly English as I did at that moment. Yet it was in rolling French that I had to proceed.

"Now, *messieurs*, you must let me direct the embarkation. The boat is small. It will require some care. Pray stop here a moment whilst I speak to the lad."

I moved rapidly towards the boat, speaking loudly in everyday tones.

"Stand by to shove off, Curtiss. Get her afloat, sharp!—I'll wade in!"

On the side of the beach, with the white zizzling tongues thrown forward by the break of each wave already around my feet, I stopped and turned round—just in time to confront two black figures, one tall, the other short, and to hear, in the detestable voice of Bauché, now hardened to distinct menace :

"*Pardon!—Excuse!*" Then, promptly capping it, the rasping tones of Cassart. "You seem in a sacred hurry, *l'Anglais!* But we have something to say!" And next to feel his hand close on my elbow.

At the same time, with the unnatural alertness born of the critical second, I noted another thing.—Down in the hollow of the beach all was very dark, but under the clear sky several new shadows could be seen advancing in an extended line. I had looked for two only. There were many more. There were five! The impression remains in my mind's eye. I seem, as I recall the black scene, to be able to count them. Five!

Seven men against two! And aboard, yonder, only three of mine, and those all unprepared for fight!

My left hand was free; in it my pistol lay ready. Without a word, by a sudden jerk I

thrust the barrel under the chin of the ruffian that held me, and fired. Then, stooping to avoid the blow that I instinctively felt coming at my head from the other side, I doubled, took my run, and splashed my way to the boat. She was already afloat. My scrambling aboard almost capsized her, and she broached to upon the next incoming roller. Both Curtiss and I were knocked off our balance. My fall certainly saved my life, for just on the instant Bauché leaped in like a tiger, and the smashing sand-bag blow he again aimed at my head fell with a sickening thud upon the thwart. And now, too, if Curtiss's weight had not been over the gunwale on the other side, the dinghy would of a certainty have been overturned. Bauché fell in headforemost over me. At the bottom of the boat his horrid instrument of secret murder was of no use ; but, in a second, he had torn his great-coat open, and the glint of a star lit blue upon an unsheathed knife. My own weapon was still in my hand : as the blade darted I fired the second barrel. I remember the lightning thought of the moment—"A misfire—and all is lost !" But (blessings on Manton and his tight priming-covers !) there was no misfire !

Unlike the huge Cassart, who had fallen without a groan, the man Bauché gave a hideous yell of rage and pain ; and as he collapsed, convulsively kicking among the stretchers, he tore at his breast and exhaled his last breaths in obscene blasphemies.

Curtiss had promptly picked himself up and righted the skiff. I too regained my feet, making ready with the other pistol for further and cooler firing, while he rowed us out of reach. And now I once more became aware of something

new and unexpected, something quite incomprehensible going on along the beach. The five figures of a moment ago, which I had expected to see dash up to the aid of their leaders, had receded into the blackness. But, out of the heart of the dark, there arose confused sounds of fighting, of flight and pursuit: calls, orders, cries of fury; and here and there points of yellow light marked the crack of shots. Then, after a minute or two—we were now fairly afloat and therefore out of reach—the sounds of strife subsided in the cove. And, presently, from the nearest fringe of the beach, a voice came, trumpeting:

“Boat ahoy!”

I seem to have the ring of it still in my ears. “*Ohé, du canot! . . .*” were the French words. It was a rough, powerful call, like a sailor’s.

“Boat ahoy!” it repeated. “Come back, if you like. All safe. We’ve got the *gredins* trussed up here!”

And, as no answer was given from our boat, the cry was raised again.

“You may come back without fear. It is I, Vidocq—Vidocq who tells it you. All’s well.”

The name meant nothing to me, then. Besides, it might be a trap. There was too much at stake to admit of my taking any risk. I made no response. Curtiss rowed for all he was worth. It was not till we were half a mile or so out at sea, that I bethought myself of lightening the craft by lifting the odious carcase, now still and limp as a rag, between the thwarts, and dropping it overboard.

Ten minutes’ pulling brought us within sight of the schooner. I hailed her, received a prompt answering hail; and passing forward with the boat-hook, I was making ready to grapple on,

when I felt underfoot something softly resisting. I groped at the bottom of the boat and picked the thing up. It was my locked letter-case, dropped out of the ruffian's breast-pocket—perhaps in the headlong fall over me, perhaps again during his furious struggle with death. My own letter-case . . . and the soft bulging of it spelt a million francs and more !

I remained a moment palsied in the midst of a tornado of thought. The bumping of the dinghy against the schooner's side awoke me. I buttoned up the packet in my breast ; then hooked on, and once more boarded the deck which the scoundrels had not meant to let me tread again.

The crew, as might be expected, were all agog. But no more did I choose to say (and wisely, I think) than this :

“ Well, my men—the French coast is no fit place for an Englishman. But your bounty is safe, and that's the main thing for you.—You have eyes and ears, and possibly Curtiss may tell you we've had a close shave of it. But it's always more wholesome for men like us to know nothing of any skirmishing on a lonely beach.—As a matter of fact, none of us have seen aught of the French coast this night. Understand ? We have been making a pleasure trip up Channel. That's the way of it, lads. And to-morrow we put in at Poole Harbour.—Now then, up with the lights again. We are back for England.”

Tired as I was, I remained on deck. The two dull red eyes up on the receding cliffs shone out in our wake a long time ; but the vigorous emotions of the last hour had swept away the former uncanny feelings. The sense of wonder

alone clung to me.—What was the mystery associated with that eerie impression of the earlier parts of the night? What, above all—for the horror of the lime-kilns might well have been but a fit of nerves—what was the sinister story of those bandits—clever, yet not quite clever enough—who had found means to lay so fully baited a trap for the capture of that mountjoy of gold which, thank the stars! was still aboard? I had escaped from the trap—aye, and carried away the bait!—It was now swelling my breast-pocket. . . . Spoils of war! Well, I had not sought war but loyal business. War had been forced on me, and I was the victor. That was clear. The rest was beyond my construing. The grey of dawn, on our starboard beam, found me still revolving fruitlessly the riddle of the night.

The riddle was not to be solved for me for many a day.

Meanwhile, my hidden cargo was safely landed at Poole. There was no difficulty there: Dorset knew me too well. A preventive, of whatever degree, would have thought it a foolish show of zeal to make any but a civil casual inquiry into the landing of Squire Oldford's chattels.

The same evening my thirty odd weighty belts were laid out, all through the silence of the night and the household safe asleep, under certain flagstones of my cellar in the old Manor House.

A secret shared is no secret. I kept mine. Within the week the London Bank was again in possession of its principal and of its quickly earned interest—but in French paper. And I had gained, together with the bonus that was my share, an increase of reputation for resourcefulness and business probity that might have

proved worth wondrous things for the future. But I contemplated no future on that line of life.

Thirty-one thousand eight hundred odd pounds, in minted sovereigns ! The problem of the future, on this new foundation, was no unpleasant speculation, of an evening, by the side of the decanter, in my peaceful bachelor house.—Yet it was a little puzzling at times. What was a greater puzzle, and at times also vaguely disconcerting, was the dispensation of fate which had consigned that treasure to a hole under the lowest stone of my house instead of, say, the reserve vaults of the Royal Bank of France. Ever and anon, in the midst of circling speculation, the name of Vidocq would spring up—meaningless still, but ever more whetting to curiosity.

One morning, at last, the knowledge came to me with the delivery of a bulky postal packet. This was a set of all the principal newspapers published in the northern departments of France, during the current month, which I had instructed an agent to collect for me. I turned eagerly to those bearing a day subsequent to the 17th. Now would I know what, if anything, was said about the brisk skirmish at the foot of Amblemont cliffs.

From the first unfolding of the miserable grey sheets, some of the names that had persistently haunted my meditation hours sparkled out as from struck flint. Vidocq . . . Bauché . . . Lebailly . . . Cassart. . . And Vidocq, again and again, in connection with what was invariably mentioned as *la bande Vidalin*—a murderous gang of ex-convicts, it seemed, cleverly and powerfully organised. It took me a long time to piece out the true story. When

made clear, the truth left me for a long time tossed upon a sea of perplexity.

Among these accounts, one in particular put the whole case with some kind of succinctness before the reader. Oddly enough it was headed, in heavy lines,

“ONE OF THE REDOUBTABLE VIDOCQ’S FAILURES

“There seems now (ran the article) every reason to think that, after all, the great *policier*’s boasted success, so fulsomely extolled of late, in capturing the Vidalin gang was not so complete as his admirers would have us believe.

“In the first place, the moving spirit of the association, Vidalin himself, is still unaccounted for: he is neither among the dead nor the prisoners. But, what is more deplorable, there is strong reason to believe that the numerous fragments of human bones lately discovered amid the lime burnt in the Amblemont kilns must be those of Messieurs de Bauché, Motteron, Cassart, and Lebailly, whose simultaneous disappearance from all human knowledge during the last week has excited so much comment lately.

“It has since transpired that these four gentlemen were engaged upon a transaction of *agiotage* upon a colossal scale with certain English gold-smugglers—who, of course, will not either ever be traced.

“By what means the *bande Vidalin*, on whose track Vidocq had for some time been at work, became possessed of every detail of the intended deal, has not yet been made clear. One unfortunate fact, however, is but too evident. Vidocq may have netted, as his admirers triumphantly repeat, most of the nefarious band, but he came

too late on the scene to prevent what appears to have been wholesale murder. Three of the bandits were dressed in a style which proves their purpose to have been the impersonation of their very victims, in order to obtain admittance to the English gold ship.—The scoundrel Grignaud, alias *le Grognaud*, for instance (who was shot in the skirmish), might well have passed for a half-pay officer, such as the unfortunate Baron Cassart. And the two others, Coupeau, alias *la Calotte*, and Tourtel—two as dangerous flowers-of-crime as ever escaped from chains—would anywhere have been accepted for respectable men of business like the missing Messieurs Motteron and Lebailly.

“Vidalin himself, we may conjecture, must have impersonated M. de Bauché.

“From the latest accounts, this ferocious beast—a terror for strength and determination—would appear to have shot the English emissary, and to have escaped in his boat, with the French money.

“In fine, all that Vidocq seems to have accomplished, in the way of prevention, is the actual safety of the English vessel—and that, most of our readers will admit, is scarce a matter on which we need congratulate him ! ”

Out of all the doubts that assail me, there is but one issue : the matter must and shall rest here. No work of mine could restore the wealth to its proper owners : their bones are already mortar ! . . . Aye, and was not even I marked out for slaughter ?

No, it were idle indeed to try and straighten out this tangled affair now. The good English gold is at least in English hands.

III
THE RESURRECTIONIST

I

THE " HEATHER BELL "

ANDREAS GAU, the student of Ghent, lately blossomed into certificated baccalaureate, had for some time been considering and rejecting various plans for the disposal of his " roaming tour."

A serious matter, not to be decided without proper weighing of pros and cons, this student's " roaming tour," this privileged year of free and unfettered life!

Men sometimes dream again of such a circling of the Zodiac, when they begin the downward path, when the duties of their lot have been achieved, or at least attempted, and when they have doffed the harness of ambition. But the dream never becomes reality. To Andreas Gau, as he sat musing by the water's edge, the question was a pleasant haunting.

In the midst of the mildly busy crowd of workers on the haven side at Antwerp, he meditatively gazed across the grey waters of the Scheldt, puffing at his handsome, long-stemmed meerschau.

The son of one Andrew Gow, whilom of bleak Aberdeen, whom business opportunities had early in life attracted to the more genial Low Countries, there to marry and sink root in the new

soil, Andreas Gau (for so had Andrew the younger been registered as a Neerlandish subject of His Majesty), although only half Flemish by blood, was thoroughly so by education and temperament. The appearance of nationality is in great measure the outcome of early nurture and surroundings. Had Andreas Gau been born to his Scots father between Don and Dee, his fair, slightly freckled face, his grey eyes and his crisp, ruddy hair would have looked well and in their right setting above a shepherd's tartan plaid and beneath a blue bonnet. Here, under the sagging travelling cap and over the loose Byronic collar of the *étudiant*, they fitted with equal appropriateness the North Flanders type.

A spare but square-shouldered lad, of no great stature but vigorously shaped, with a face more than ordinarily well-favoured—in spite of the bright redness of his hair, for there are those who entertain as instant an antipathy to locks of that colour as others feel to the neighbourhood of cats.

The pigment qualities of his hair were truly interesting. Never, in all likelihood, had such a gradation of rich tints been observed on man before. They ranged from the deep ruddiness of oxidised copper on the vault of the cranium to a gradually lightening sheen of spun gold as they spread towards the temples and down the nape of the neck, where in any bright light they would shine with metallic sparkle. "Tinsel" was the nickname bestowed upon the owner of the fiery head by the brothers of the noted "*Gandavum*" association. It was not altogether unfamiliar among the ladies of the town; and this attractive scintillation had, no doubt, been responsible for more than one engaging adven-

ture.—It was destined to introduce him to others of a more startling order.

As he sat on his little tub, placidly gazing at what appeared to be the final preparations for departure on board the small ship nearest him ; losing himself the while (as befits your right baccalaureus) amid the speculations of a mind filled both with book lore and picturesque ideals, easy flowing and as fleeting as the smoke that curled from his pipe-bowl, all of a sudden a novel, and this time a very definite, idea crossed his mind.

A chance phrase caught his ear, spoken in the broadest of Scots :

" Ou, aye, she'll mak' Leith a' richt before the Sabbath, gin we can clear by noon. The wund is steady to the east."

Andreas Gau, who had learned what he held to be the English tongue from a Scots father, took in the sound with some emotion. He had not heard anything like it since worthy Andrew Gow's death.

Leith !—That was in Scotland, in his father's land. And he had never before dreamed of seeing anything of that other fatherland, Scotland ! . . . Eh, eh ! Why not ? It was new ground. It was picturesque. It was a taking fantasy. Eh, why not ? . . . What were the roaming days for, but to expand the mind and delight the soul by new impressions and wider perspective ? Was he not free to select any point of the compass ; free to go where he list, so long, indeed, as it remained within the capacity of his purse ? Again, why not ? From all that he had ever heard of the paternal country, up yonder in the strenuous North, economy (that admirable and, in sooth, most necessary virtue) could be observed

in Scotland almost as closely as in the Netherlands themselves.

With lips still pursed upon his last breath of tobacco, he watched the skipper prepare to pass on board. Suddenly he blew out the jet of smoke, rose hastily and followed him.

"Pardon! Mr. Captain will perhaps allow me——"

The man wheeled round and gazed with small, hard grey eyes from under bushy eyebrows at the amiable-mannered foreigner who, cap in hand and head slightly bent in salutation, spoke with so odd a blend of Scots and Flemish accents.

"Aye, and wha micht ye be, ma lad?" he asked at length.

"Andreas Gau, from Ghent, sir. You sail to-day, Mr. Captain, I understand?"

"Mebbe. What's your wull?"

"Mr. Captain, I am on travelling tour. I have not yet seen Scotland, from which came my father, whose name was Gow. Gow is a Scots name; is it not true?"

"Aye, A'll no positeevely say the contrary," came the non-committal answer. "What will ye be wantin' of me?"

"How much would it cost to sail with you to Leith? You go to Leith?"

"Aye, I touch at Leith. But the brig is nae passenger-boat. I've nae accommodation."

Andreas Gau remained a moment longer upon the gangway, dashed with vexation at this check. His sudden fancy to sail away toward the beckoning distant North had hardened into a desire almost passionate. The skipper waited, his calculating eye upon him.

"I'll no say, ma lad," quoth he then, "that I'd althegither refuse to carry ye, gin ye'll pay

the siller. But I tak it a younker like yersel' wull na put up with a seaman's bunk and seaman's vittles."

The youth, all eagerness, stepped closer.

"A thousand thanks, Mr. Captain. But what costs the passage?"

The canny Scot remained a moment in tantalising silence.

"Weel, lad, A micht be wulling to drop you at Leith for—for ten guldens, paid down. It canna possibly be less than a five days' run, ye'll notice," he hastened to add, as he marked a twitch of dismay upon the youth's face. Andreas Gau, half Scots by descent and, as we said, wholly Fleming by habit, had a distaste for the lavishing of silver. "I might have to keep you in bite and sup de'il only kens how lang if it cam' to blaw ahead. Hoot, mon, tak' it or want it," concluded the skipper breezily, seeing now that the bargain, albeit not without a wrench, was about to be accepted.

Within half an hour of this sudden fancy, typical of the roving student spirit, the young man had slapped the ten silver pieces of his passage money upon the table in the little reeking cabin, had tossed a glass of Schiedam in ratification of the treaty, had fetched his valise from the harbour estaminet, and finally found himself a passenger on board the brig *Heather Bell*, bound from Antwerp to Leith, Dundee, and Stonehaven. And soon after noon, on that April Monday of the year 1828, he was already plumbing to their fullest depth the hitherto unguessed horrors of sea-sickness.

For two days Andreas Gau remained in an all but comatose condition, with just sense enough in his more lucid moments to wish he had never

been born. On the third evening he was able to swallow a groat's worth of that simple fare for which he was paying four good shillings a day. On the next he was up, weak but ravenous; and as the good ship merrily slipped straight sunsetward, he could even find it in him to muse upon the glory of a Viking's life.

The fifth morning revealed at last, under the level rays of early sun, a jagged outline in the distance ahead. Mountains of Scotland! Truly romantic sight! Well worth (thought the youth, now his own philosophising self once more) the price lately paid for it in coin and in hardship of the sea.

"And that grey place yonder, my dear Mr. Captain, under the cloud of mist," he ventured to ask the uncommunicative skipper, "that is perhaps the capital? When shall we arrive?"

"Aye, laddie, yon's Auld Reekie richt eneuch! Hoot!" He pointed in disgust to sails that began to slacken under a falling breeze. "But we needna reckon the noo to cast anchor in time for the Word."

This, in truth, was hardly as great a matter of concern for the Belgic student as it might have been for his Scots father. But his patience was sorely taxed by the sluggish progress of the brig as, hour after hour, he watched the distant coast and the fascinating, smoke-capped, unknown city of the hillside rise slowly and grow clearer to view. The sun was already turning red and dull as a wafer amid the evening mists when the *Heather Bell*—prohibited upon the Lord's Day to come alongside—dropped her anchor in the roadstead and sent her dinghy ashore.

In an unwonted spurt of liberality the skipper

offered to allow his passenger another night on board—"free of charge, I'll hae ye ken, lad"—in consideration of its being the Sabbath evening. But the youth was too eager to recover freedom of movement. The vision which had tantalised him all day was too alluring for him to postpone the taste of closer acquaintanceship. In his best chosen phrases he requested the favour of an immediate landing.

"Aweel, a wi'ful man maun ha' his way," was the skipper's valediction. "Ye'll hae to shoulder your pokmantle yersel', for ye'll fin' nane on the Sawbath to carry it for ye."

II

PATTERSON'S "LAND"

HAD Andreas Gau accepted the hospitable offer—an offer which, in other circumstances, he would, with his regard for strict economy, undoubtedly have found welcome enough ; or, once landed, had he moved straight away into the town, as common prudence might have suggested, at the hour of rising dusk, to a traveller still uncertain of a lodging, the experiences of his first night in Edinburgh would have been singularly different.

To most of us a chance word, a passing glance, may determine good fortune or disaster. How much more easily, then, may a stranger, friendless, on ground unknown, drift into dark perils at the hazard of an idle whim.

After climbing, not without a fall or two, some incredibly slimy stairs, Andreas found himself on the steady ground of the West Quay, and paused to take in, fully and philosophically, the novel impression—Scotland ! He dropped his valise, and leaning his arms upon the parapet, yielded himself to contemplation.

In his native Belgian land, on a fine evening like this, pier and harbour side would have been noisily cheerful with Sunday promenaders. Children would have been running through and through the groups in their play. From neigh-

bouring houses, certainly from some inevitable open-air café not far away, would have come sounds of joviality, music, and voices uplifted in song. But how mournful was the silence that here reigned ! Far or near, scarce two or three human creatures within sight ; and these moving stealthily, as though they had no right to be abroad at all on a Sabbath eve at the hour of meeting. He began to feel deeply impressed by the unnatural stillness. A light leaped up at the end of the pier, then here and there an answering gleam in the vessels riding at anchor in the roadstead. A flag, hauled down at the other side of the harbour, proclaimed the official setting of the sun. But those seemed to be the only signs of life. The dismal silence grew ever more oppressive, emphasised by the dwindling of the seafowl's cries as the evening set in.

The young man gazed at the scene, so unlike what his rich imagination had anticipated. The universal inertia began, like a pall, to envelop his spirit. He had lost sense of the flight of time, when a sound of approaching footsteps woke him to reality. Here was a fellow human within hail at last.

Hastily he bent to pick up his valise. The cap fell from his head, his copper locks caught fire from the last sunset gleam.

The steps halted close to him, and a hoarse, unctuous whisper exclaimed almost in his ear :

" Whoy, Misther Dalziel ! An' I believed ye were——"

The words died away as Andreas, straightening himself, turned his honest, handsome face and smiled inquiringly at the new-comer.

" Och ! an' I beg your pardon, sorr. Shure, it's mistaken entoirely I was,"

The man would have passed on hurriedly, but Andreas stopped him with a gesture.

"You will, no doubt, be good enough to tell me," he said in his elaborate English, "which is the nearest way to Greenside, in Edinburgh? I am even now landed. I know not a single person."

He whom he addressed thus was a short, thick-set fellow, broad-shouldered and muscular, with a hard, stubborn face and bright-blue eyes; clean-shaven but for sandy, close-cropped whiskers that descended nearly down to his chin. Clad as he was in a tight-fitting blue surtout that had once been a gentleman's garment, in fustian smalls, ankle boots and whitish stockings, he seemed unmistakably to belong to that class whose livelihood is the casual job. He stood eyeing the speaker intently, as though endeavouring to understand the outlandish talk; silent, as if revolving the matter in his head. He touched his cap at last.

"Is it Greenside ye mean? Faith, an' it's a good stip from here, yer honour. An' it's little conveyance ye'll find in Leith on a Sunday. Two miles an' a bittock, as they say in this country."

"I will willingly walk, if you will kindly tell me the way."

Spreading an ingratiating smile upon his unprepossessing features, the man grew affectionately inquisitive.

"And whereabouts in Greenside would your honour wish to go?"

"The captain of my boat spoke of an inn—at the Pack Horse—decent and not dear."

"Is it the Pack Horse away beyont?"

The tone expressed so much doubt that the

traveller, believing it to refer to the distance, hastened to amend his question.

" Perhaps you can kindly direct me to some honest house nearer—not too dear, either—for to-night ? "

" Bedad, they're in plenty. But there'll be no getting in till after church sarvice, as maybe you'll not know, being, with respect, as one may see, a furriner. A good hour from now that'll be."

Here the man dropped his eyes and seemed to ponder. On a movement, slightly impatient, of the traveller he looked up again and resumed :

" Since your honour is willing to foot it, he might as well go on to Embro' as remain here. The Pack Horse, is it ? And why would I not show ye the way mesel' ? "

To the Belgian's unpractised ear there was something puzzling in the fellow's voice and speech ; he even failed to catch the meaning of some of his words, pronounced with an accent totally new to him. But there was no mistaking his purpose, which was to take charge of the valise.

" I thank you very much," said Andreas with polite caution. " How much will you demand to guide me to this place ? "

The other hesitated a moment ; then, with an engaging air :

" Shure, nów," he said, " would I be askin' to be paid for showin' the way to a gintleman, and him just landed from furrin parts ? And didn't ye say you know nivver a sowl in the place ? Faith, I was going back meself to the ould town. Why would I not take ye through Greenside on me way, now ? "

His manner was so winning that Andreas promptly fell a victim.

"Thank you greatly, friend," he answered. "I will go with you, since you are so amiable. But, no, no, I will myself carry my bag."

The man laughed pleasantly.

"Divil a bit, your honour! Faith, and it's a feather to me. Isn't it my trade to carry loads? I've carried many a sack heavier than yerself, let alone your bag, and niver thought it more than a fair day's work. But here, in this black Prodesan' country, shure a fellow 'ud be hard set to git an honest job on a Sunday."

"Are you not a Scotsman, then?" asked Andreas, as they moved away together from the silent harbourside and plunged into an almost equally deserted side street.

"How did your honour discover that, now? Faith, no, then. I am from Ould Ireland; and I'd be there still, but it's starving I was. This is a black Prodesan' country, as I was sayin', but there's a dacent livin' to be made, anyhow."

After a while Andreas would fain have dispensed with the flow of conversation which his guide poured upon him between the water's edge and the outskirts of Edinburgh. More than once, indeed, did he impatiently regret the freak of chance which had thus saddled him with a garrulous companion when he would have gladly devoted his every sense to the picturesqueness of the new scenes he was passing through. An everyday porter would have walked, he imagined, a pace or so behind; would only have spoken, and that usefully, when questioned. But here the position was singularly reversed. Almost every sentence of his self-appointed guide took, after the Hibernian fashion, a more or less interrogative form. And if, in truth, every question did not actually require

an answer, a goodly number at least elicited some kind of response.

In this wise, by the time they had reached the top of Leith Walk, and the rising slope of the Old Town stood, black and jagged, in front of them against the orange of the afterglow, the relations between the stranger and his honorary attendant had perforce assumed an almost friendly character. And if the traveller had no other knowledge of his porter than that he was Irish, and of a temperament apparently much more genial than the Puritan Scots, the porter, on his side, had gathered many points of information touching the circumstances of the traveller.

"Well, your honour, here we are by Green-side." The loquacious guide paused at last and jerked his thumb towards the narrow streets that dipped abruptly to the left. "And it's sorry I am to leave you, sorr. But I'll see ye to the Pack Horse, though it's the queer lodging." He stopped, dropped the bag, and looked meaningly. "It's the queer lodging," he repeated, "for the like of your honour. If ye'll believe me," he went on, with the air of one making up his mind to out at last with a warning, "they're not quite the safe place, these same Low Calton lanes, for a stranger."

Of a truth, the cold, sombre, alley-like street, that wound steeply down towards the foot of the darkling Calton Hill, to dwindle away into miserable tumble-down shanties, was distinctly uninviting. The young man gazed at the doleful prospect.

"The skipper most warmly recommended the house," he said hesitatingly.

"And, sure, I was thinking something of the

kind," was the cryptic answer—one which considerably increased the wayfarer's disquietude.

"How do you mean that?" he cried sharply.

The Irishman shuffled his feet, then gripped the bag.

"Now, I'm not maning anything at all. I'll lave your honour at the dirty place, annyhow, since ye're so bent on ut. There's thim that take a hint, and thim that won't."

"Halt, halt!" cried the student. "I am sure you mean kindly. Perhaps you can tell me of some other lodging-place not far from here?"

The porter scratched his head.

"I wouldn't say I'd be knowin' any place altogether fit for a gintleman like yerself——"

"So long as it is decent," interrupted the Belgian, "and not expensive."

His companion became of a sudden all cheerful alacrity.

"Why, now, I could show yer honour a lodging where ye'd be warm and dacent, annyhow—and safe," he added emphatically, and spat upon the ground. "Safe, sorr, and true for you. 'Tis a thrap, that same Pack Horse, a rale ould smugglin' man-thrap. Ah, I was thinkin' it was some sea fellow told ye of it. Arrah, an' ye'll be guided by me, sorr? Ah, now, and it's good hearin'. It's not far to go, and if ye don't like it when ye see ut, why, aisy enough to bring ye back to yon dirty Pack Horse, or annywhere else."

There was no reason to demur at so hearty an offer, which, in fact, was accepted with something of eagerness. And with a fresh zest, Andreas Gau followed his chance-sent guide across the North Bridge, down to the Nor' Loch

end of the Fleshmarket, and then penetrated the labyrinth of narrow wynds, of well-like closes and alleys that reached up as far as the High Street.

Truth to say, the purlieus seemed little less squalid and evil-smelling than the condemned Low Calton lanes. But the philosophic traveller was now absorbed in the novel interest of those incredibly tall buildings—twelve storeys high and more, as seen from the north side slope. Acquainted as he was with the huge rookeries of old Ghent, never had he dreamed of such an accumulation, skyward, of human tenements. Night was falling fast. Already dots of light blinked here and there in the endless vertical lines, emphasising the height, the darkness, and the silence. At this hour, save for now and again some sullenly drunken creature leaning in a doorway, or some barefooted slut that furtively ran round a corner, wynds and closes were as deserted as had been the broad, respectable street. From the moment of their turning away from Leith Walk they had not met anything that seemed to possess a soul.

At the steeper part of the wynd, under a vaulted entry, the porter, who had been increasing his pace, and of late had been looking about him with an ill-concealed anxiety, suddenly stopped by an open doorway.

"Here we are, your honour," he said in a lowered voice. "It's mighty black below, but you'll find it lighter above." Then, marking through the gloom some hesitancy in his companion's attitude, he went on hurriedly: "You'll be wondering now, maybe, why I hoorooshed along just now? Shure, then, you don't know a Prodesan' Sunday—the better luck to you!

I'd liefer, ye'll understand, none of the neighbours saw me portering on the Sabbath during service hours, bedad! Well, praise be, ye are here at last. Leastways, ye'll soon be. 'Tis a stip or two to the top, though it's grand ye'll find it when ye have it underfoot. Careful, now, sorr. Follow the sound of me feet."

Still speaking, and still in firm possession of the valise, he briskly began the ascent. The traveller had no option but to follow.

In this wise did Andreas Gau make acquaintance with the "scale" stairs of an old Edinburgh "land," the interminable corkscrew way, leading in giddy spirals to seemingly interminable sets of flats.

He engaged, through pitch darkness and musty smell, upon the first flight, a vague distrust in his mind; but this was promptly dispelled by the returning smack of adventure. As he tried to come even with the footsteps for ever sounding ahead on the stones from some unseen turn, he could fancy himself passing through a fantastic story of Musæus or Theodore Hoffmann. It was exhausting, no doubt, but how eerily romantic! How much more interesting, in a strange country, than the trite bargain for a bed at some everyday hostelry. On he tramped bravely, smiling to himself in the dark.

The "scale" was innocent of any attempt at illumination. When, however, a few flats had been left below, a faint gleaming from outside—the red of the fast dying afterglow—penetrated through an occasional narrow, grimy window, giving a new weirdness to the dream-like scene. Now and again, as he passed a landing, he could

espy a ray of light through the chinks of an ill-fitting door, catch a few dull sounds of voices or of moving. So, after all, there was some life in this immense pile. Still the footfall clanged mercilessly on the stone ahead.

He had lost count of the numberless flights, he was out of all breath, the blood was beginning to beat painfully in his temples. In fact, the alluring, dream-like impression was threatening to trench upon nightmare, when at last the guiding steps halted. Almost immediately he could hear a hasty fumbling of key at keyhole, and by the time he had reached the final landing—for this was indeed the topmost of the building—he could, in the faint light, discern the blackness of a gaping doorway. From the recesses of the room beyond the porter's voice rang out :

" It is a stip up, as I tould your honour. But, glory be to God, it's nearer Hivven ye are, anyhow, than down in Low Calton ! Wan moment, sorr ; we'll have a glim."

There came the sound of the valise tossed upon the floor, then the hurried clicks of steel on flint ; a shower of yellow sparks sprang upon the black, and there followed a noisy blowing upon the tinder-box. From the landing where, dazed, gasping for breath, he stood motionless, the traveller could see presently the lambent-blue flame of the sulphur match. A moment later a tallow candle had been set alight. Then out rolled the voice again :

" Will not your honour walk in ? "

Thus, jockeyed to the last, Andreas entered his Edinburgh apartment. And again the love of the picturesque, the ever-welcome impression of " fantaisie," dispelled the misgivings which

had once more assailed him and with increased force.

Even those who are familiar with the Old Town "lands," now tenanted only by the poorest of the artisan and labouring classes, can scarce, without an effort of imagination, realise that they were once the dwelling-place of the best born and best to do, the learned and the famous of their age ; and that, in these ancient mansions, now fallen so far from their pristine estate, springing up, storey after storey, from some dark fetid alley, as if in search of light and breathable air, the topmost flights reached by the weary, noisome common stair were once the choicest in fashion—being farthest removed from the squalor of the street.

To Andreas, naturally, quite unacquainted with the character of such strange buildings, the place into which, after passing through a narrow black lobby, he was now ushered, was simply fantastic.

By the uncertain light of the candle, he gazed upon his surroundings with amazement. It was a low-ceiled room ; the walls on three sides, though retaining fragments of handsome wood panelling, for the most part revealed little but bare lath and plaster. The remaining side was boarded with rough planking, which evidently served to convert an originally large room into two ; a fact further made patent by the ceiling, where, in spite of dilapidation, a fine decorative pattern of plaster work could still be descried, unsymmetrically cut athwart by the partition.

Close to this boarding rose what had once been the fireplace of the main apartment. Over the dilapidated mantelshelf traces of a defaced escutcheon were still discernible. But the hearth

—by the side of which, no doubt, a century before, the silk-clad shins of gentlemen discussing their claret had many a time been toasted on a winter's night—was bricked up to keep away the cold draught.

A long, mullioned window allowed a faintly gleaming view of the skies through the only one of the three lights which still boasted a glass pane. The others were efficiently blocked with matchwood and brown paper.

The furniture was, on the whole, in keeping with the condition of the apartment. A narrow bed, screened off in a corner by a brown blanket that hung from nails in the ceiling; a deal table, upon which were scattered papers, quills, and books round a cheap pewter standish; a succinct washstand; a couple of stools; and, oddly enough, a fairly comfortable-looking arm-chair. Screws, driven into the wooden partition, upon which hung sundry garments of masculine appearance, met the want of cupboard accommodation.

The young man gazed about him more and more puzzled.

"If your honour," presently said his guide, who, candle in hand, had been watching him with something of a frown in his eyes, though the mouth maintained its smile, "if your honour will put up with it for the night, it's the honest lodging he will find it, anyway."

"But—my good fellow," objected Andreas, pointing generally to the signs of occupancy, the clothes on the hooks, the books on the table, "this room is not free."

The porter followed the gesture with a quick glance.

"Not free, is it?" he cried. "Faith, then

that is soon mended. Free in a minute, your honour."

Putting down the candlestick on the floor, he began briskly to clear the table. But the other raised his hand, interposing :

"Halt ! Halt ! One moment, my excellent fellow. Where have you brought me to ? This is not an hotel. I must understand——"

A hard gleam of anger, instantly repressed, shot out of the Irishman's small eyes. As though in dudgeon, he threw back the books on the table, and picked up his candle again. Then, with a whine of injured feeling :

"Shure," he protested, "and isn't the room better than what ye were seeking yerself at the Pack Horse, in Low Calton ? And didn't ye say ye wished for a lodgin' not dear ? Them was your very words. And isn't it friendly-like that I have been with ye all along the quay, helpin' the stranger that knows ne'er a wan in the town ? And is it for more money than ye're willing to pay that I'd be askin' ?" With wheedling volubility he bore down the interruption that rose to the guest's lips. "Him that has this room mostly—shure he's a student and a gentleman, though it's poor enough he is, God help us ! he doesn't think it too much to pay sivven shillin's a week. And why wouldn't I make an honest shillin' a night when he's away ? Sure, now, a shillin' isn't too much for the accommodation. But if your honour doesn't like the look of it, why, in course, there's the Pack Horse, and welcome. But it's hard, after me showin' you about, all the way from Leith side. Well, there's your bag, and your honour knows the way. But, bedad, it's more than a shillin' a night they'll get out of you !"

He had raised his candle above his head and was peering with an odd look of intentness at the hesitating listener. For one second there came a ferocious tightening upon his lip ; he made a slight move sideways, as though, one might have thought, to bar the way to the door. The student noticed nothing, absorbed in self-debate. After all, why not ? The place was clean enough—and picturesque, certainly—and attractively inexpensive.

The other was quick to perceive that he had carried his point.

" Ah, now, your honour," he went on, pursuing his advantage, " it's not the gentleman like yourself would have come along of me all the time, just to dispise me friendly offer. But ye'll lose nothing, for it's right tight and comfortable I'll make you this night."

In such manner was the bargain struck between the wanderer in search of adventure and the casual letter of lodgings with the gift of persuasiveness. Thus, singularly, on his first night in Edinburgh, Andreas Gau, the roaming student, found himself installed in the topmost rooms of what was perhaps the tallest remaining land of the Old Town—an experience which it would require an extraordinary conjunction of circumstances to bring in the way of the most inquisitive traveller.

III

“ MICHING MALLECHO ”

ANDREAS had sunk into the arm-chair. He was weary. Although his quarters might not be altogether satisfactory, the lodging question was settled, at least for the night ; and he welcomed the thought that he would not have to tramp down those stairs and those dark lanes again in search of supper, his misgivings on this last score having been allayed by the solicitous Irishman.

“ I would not,” had said this latter, “ be advising a stranger to go and speer round for eating-houses in the town on a Sunday evenin’. But, if your honour would jist make shift to stay your stomach for half an hour with a pipeful of baccy, why, wouldn’t I provide you with as good a treat as you’d like to find yerself, and for less money ? Leave it to me, sorr. Wouldn’t a small mutton-pie, now, a morsel of cheese, and a farl or two, and a noggin of whisky for a nightcap, be rale comfort ? ”

The student could scarce take in more than the general meaning of all this rattle. But he nodded acquiescence as he dreamily began to fill his pipe.

“ Stop a bit, though,” said the man, upon a thought. “ Before I go I’d best light a bit o’ fire in me little room yonder. A mutton-pie’s no

worse for being hotted. Then there'll be also a drap of boilin' wather for the glass of toddy. Didn't I say I would make ye comfortable, now ?—Wan minut with the candle, sorr.”

On the word he seized the light and sallied out. Presently he could be heard entering the room behind the partition.

The ill-jointed boards reached short of the ceiling, in some parts short also of the floor ; and through the gaps Andreas could see the rays of the candle dance upon the ruinous plaster work. There came the genial sound of crackling wood, followed by a somewhat prolonged puffing of the bellows. His task apparently concluded, the porter came in again, replaced the candle upon the table, then, saying with a nod and confident grin : “ Patient now, for the time to go down and up again,” went out, closing both doors—the outer one with something of a clang.

Andreas lit his pipe—that sedulously cared for, that cherished “ sea-foam ” bowl with the jasmin and amber stem—and began a philosophical smoke ; casting his eyes lazily around ; musing upon the enigma of the decorated ceiling and broken escutcheon, the general mystery of his high-perched dwelling ; wondering, not without a sense of comfort, at the immense silence. The pipe was soothing. He was more tired than he had been aware at first, after his day of drawn-out watching on board ship, his walk from the harbour, and his long fast. He listlessly reached for one of the books on the table and opened it. A medical work, Dr. Knox's *Human Anatomy*. Upon the title page the owner's name was inscribed in red ink : Archibald Dalziel. Vaguely it seemed to him not altogether unfamiliar. But his attention soon floated away.

The book dropped on his knee, and he smoked on, once more gazing upwards. Upon the ceiling and through the chinks he noted a faint glow—the fire in the next room, of course. The situation was full of calm.

He fell into a doze, which, grateful at first, gradually passed into a heavy torpor filled with distress. The candle had burned about half-way when the opening of the door and heavy footsteps awoke him with a start which—an experience totally new to the sturdy youth—seemed to produce instantly an excruciating headache.

He raised his hand to his forehead, and, in a dazed way, watched the man who had entered, carrying a tied-up napkin, and was approaching the table. But he had to close his eyes again to fight with an intolerable lancing pain in his temples.

“What’s the mather, sorr?”

Andreas started again. If he had been asleep, this surely was nightmare. The flame of the candle was dancing now close to his aching eyeballs; behind it, redly illumined, a coarse, savage face, peering fierce eyes. His friendly porter? Impossible!

“What’s the mather, now? Is it onaisy ye feel? Faith, ye look but poorly! Och, and yer supper awaitin’ ye, all neat and ready! Take a drop of the craythur, sorr.”

If the words could have implied solicitude, the voice struck harsh, sneering even, upon the student’s bewildered ear. He waved the proffered case-bottle, and, with an immense effort, rose to his feet. But sudden vertigo overtook him, and he had to cling for support to the bull neck of his companion.

"Aisy, now, your honour! Hold up! Be-dad, it's not supper ye seem to be wantin'; faith, it's the dochter! Lie down."

Yes, those horrible grating tones were sneering at him. Andreas, striving painfully to fix his wandering mind, felt himself clutched, brutally dragged along, then he was flung upon the bed.

"Quiet, now!" the voice went on. "Sleep till I come back. For it's the dochter I'll have to be after fetchin' for ye."

The stricken youth heard the words; heard the heavy footsteps hurriedly retreating, the clap-to of the door, and then the grating of a key in the lock. But he was too far gone in weakness to associate with this sound any new significance of terror. He hearkened, stupidly, to the tramp of feet, careless, no longer hasty, across the landing; the beat of nailed shoes slowly descending the stone steps, and suddenly he was conscious of an abrupt silence.

In his recumbent position he felt at first a little easier. He tried to gather his scattered thoughts, to make out what had happened to him. But, after this brief lull, an overwhelming distress rushed again upon him. He attempted to get up, but could barely raise himself on his elbow and tear at his collar, which, loose as it was, seemed to suffocate him. The blood hammered now in his head with deafening noise. Then it stopped of a sudden, and he fell back unconscious.

From this faint he awoke once more to sensibility, though incapable of movement. The pounding in his arteries had ceased; it was as if his very heart had lost its beat. But, although palsied to absolute powerlessness, every sense

was sharpened to the uttermost capacity for suffering : a fold in his clothing, a lump in the bed, the pressure of a belt, of a ring, of a button, seemed to bruise his flesh beyond bearing. Then, presently, there came into his nostrils and upon his tongue a taste, a smell, the acridness of which was a thing inconceivable. It made the tears run down his cheeks. At this, his helplessly closed lids partly opened—and a new anguish leaped upon him. The light of the guttering candle, faint as it was (for the hanging blanket mercifully screened it from direct view), stabbed into his head at each fitful flicker. He rolled his eyeballs upwards, away from the torture, with a supreme effort, and now the spreading red glow on the ceiling seared them like a hot iron.

Up to then the stillness had been complete. But a sharp cracking of the wooden partition suddenly lashed into his brain like the cut of a whip, showing that, like the others, the sense of hearing had become incredibly acute. Indeed, his ear was now so sensitive that, through two closed doors, all the way from the fathomless bottom of the scale, came to him a new sound, terrifying. Steps upon the stairs. Up, up! Slow, leisurely steps, each one treading, as it were, upon his brain. Those stairs—up and up, round and round! Why, it was himself who had to mount, in time to those steps, for ever following! No. He was lying, bound hand and foot; but someone was coming up the stairs—closer, ever more loudly, horribly near. A tramping giant. This would never stop—this was death, hell! A cry? Yes—an angry, growling cry. Were there wild beasts, there? A silence. The steps had stopped. Thank

Heaven the steps had stopped ! Now an uproar of voices. Silence once more. The wild beast growl again, and a loud, furious voice : “ *Good God ! . . . not that ! Never say that ! Stand aside, you—you scoundrel ! Open the door, you hound !* ” (“ I knew it was a beast, not a man,” thought a point of agonising intelligence in Andreas’ brain.) “ *Arrah, now, it’s too late, annyhow ! And, fool that ye are, isn’t it a hangin’ matter for both of us——*”

(“ Can dogs speak ? ” The prone man had an inward, racking, chuckle ; no, it was the Irishman, of course.)

The tense, attenuated thread of reasoning snapped suddenly. There were sounds of a savage scuffle outside. The door was shaken as with thunder. A key shrieked round in the lock. In the pain that now assailed his hearing, a shroud as of lead dropped upon him. The incredible activity of his senses swiftly fell away. The rush of feet into the room seemed now at some immense distance. The candle flame, held close to his face, showed but as a red gleam through folds of mist. Vaguely, he heard a voice—not the voice of the beast—say, “ Praise the Lord—not yet ! ” There was a clatter of breaking glass panes. He was now caught, uplifted from the bed ; carried away for a space as upon a pitching sea ; then, with a jar, found himself once more prone, a draught of cold air flowing across him like water. A moment of exquisite relief and revival ; but, presently, with a hissing like that of myriad serpents, wave upon wave of noisome vapours closed upon him. He sank into the horrible sea, and was lost.

The deep bell of St. Giles’s was dropping the

last stroke of eleven. Andreas opened his eyes and found himself, as it were, bathed in cool blue light. The sensation was grateful, almost ecstatic.

After a moment of confused wondering, he realised that he was in bed, facing a wide-open window ; that the light fell from a cloudless sky ; that the coolness was brought by a breeze coming in fitful puffs to fan his face. Slowly his glance shifted and became fixed. A vague nightmare feeling, reminiscent of some ill-forgotten state of horror, came like a shadow across his placidity. At the foot of the bed, in the arm-chair, sat a figure, cross-kneed, with head pensively resting on its hand. Never, except in his own looking-glass, had he known a head of that colour. " Tinsel ! "

Terror mounted to his brain, with inchoate recollections of " doubles," of omens, wraiths. Tinsel gazing upon himself ! He made an effort to lift his head ; on the instant, echoes of pain shot through every nerve. Inconceivably weak, he fell back on his pillow. The man in the chair started, rose and bent over him. Their eyes met. The fantastic dread was dissipated like a mist under the kind, steady look and the friendly smile of the unknown face. He presently felt the pressure of two fingers upon his wrist, and a voice, as pleasant as the smile, said :
" Coming round, nicely. Praise the Lord ! "

Praise the Lord ! Andreas recalled the words as mixed up, somehow, with the horrors that still lay at the back of his consciousness. Memory was beginning to return. He attempted to speak, to question, but his words came only in whispers. The other lifted a warning hand :

" Not yet, mannie ! We'll talk when you're

stronger. Meanwhile, be assured you are all right—in safe hands this time, thank God! Drink this. Drink as much as you can. Then, quiet.”

Again the words recalled flashes of odious impressions, but their tone was so kindly that they had a soothing effect. He drank, sank back, and, without trying to understand any further for the moment, fell asleep.

IV

SKIRTS OF HAPPY CHANCE

“ ENOUGH of the facts I now understand,” said Andreas. He spoke slowly, for the weakness was still in him, and with the preciseness of a speech that is not of everyday familiarity. He was sitting in bed, propped up with pillows, considerably revived. His brain could once more clearly control his thoughts. “ The facts, I understand,” he repeated ; “ and how you, my honoured Mr. Dallial—have I your name right ? Yes. How you, returning unexpectedly, rescued me, just in the nick of time, your own phrase, sir—on the verge of eternity, by my sensations ! ” The red head at the foot of the bed nodded to the red head flaming on the pillow. But the rescued man, pondering, amended his phrase : “ In good truth,” he went on solemnly. “ I was over eternity—in hell, I deemed.”

Dalziel had a professional air :

“ From all you tell me of those sensations,” he began, “ the carbonyle poisoning, the charcoal fumes, you know, that very nearly carried you off, produced in you the well-known symptoms of hyperæsthesia, that is, I need hardly tell you, Mr. Gau, exasperated sensitiveness of all the nerves, followed by syncope. It was, indeed, a fortunate chance that I——”

"It was the mercy of God, Mr. Dallial," interrupted the Belgian gravely.

"At any rate, it was no bad thing for you, my lad, that I should happen to be a budding medico, and——"

But Andreas, lifting his finger, brought him back, with the pertinacity of the Fleming, to the point he was endeavouring to elucidate.

"The facts, I was saying, are established. I was beguiled. I was trapped. I was nearly murdered by the first man I met on the shores of my father's native land. Why? Without your, I gather your quite unpremeditated, return to your room, the fumes of the charcoal, kindled behind yonder partition, must have done their intended work. What was the reason? Scarcely the money that a travelling student, just arrived in a mean merchant boat, might be likely to carry about him. I do not understand."

Dalziel ducked his head, as if to avoid the gaze that shone so earnestly out of the pale face. Then he looked up and smiled, the good smile that, from the first, had been warrant for his loyalty.

"It's not surprising you should not understand. My certes! it's as much as I can do to understand myself. We sawbones," he went on, twisting his lip humorously, "are supposed to know all the devilment that can take place in a man's inside. But, 'pon my life, laddie, until last night I never as much as guessed at the rottenness that can be discovered in a man's soul. A fellow, mind you, I'd had dealings with time and again—all in the way of business, be it understood. Honest—in his line. Punctual. Confounded clever, too. And, all said and done, doing no one, no living creature at least, wrong."

The listener's eyes were growing round with amazement in the darkened orbits. The other broke off, laughing; he leaned forward and patted the limb nearest to him with friendly hand.

"There, never fash yourself," he resumed. "It's worse for you to be puzzling than to hear the whole tale, though it's grim. Fact is, lad, I'd run a rig——"

"A rig?"

"Yes. I'd made a mess—oh, a precious mess—of things. Been a muckle ass. Found myself in a tight place; run the rig aforesaid; couldn't get out of the mess, except by one road."

Andreas was gazing thoughtfully at the clever, vivid countenance. And, as he gazed, he began to read in its somewhat ravaged traits a story of recklessness, dissipation, and their attendant retribution.

"One road," repeated Dalziel. "One of three ways at my choice." He drew his hand across his throat, then pointed his forefinger at his forehead and clicked his tongue, and finally jerked his thumb towards the partition. "I fixed upon the last, the way you so nearly took, my friend." He grinned as he said this. "I thought charcoal was the least unpleasant mode. From what you have told me, it seems I was wrong: I might have experienced all your sensations! Hang it, I would, of a certainty, since we are so mighty like complexioned, you and I.—I didn't think, though, there could exist another head quite so carroty as mine in the whole world!"

"Nor I," said Gau, "another like my own. They called me Tinsel—on account of its sparkle. A singular coincidence. Truly comic."

"Comic, you say? It was deuced near being your tragedy! Aye—and mine too, a worse one. Worse!" repeated the Scotsman with a deepening note. "Tinsel, did they call you? You'd have been quenched for that sparkling. And as for me—fire from it for everlasting remorse!" But he shook off the rising solemnity. "Yes," he resumed. "I see it; it was our carrots did it."

Gau closed his eyes.

"You promised me explanations," he murmured faintly.

Again Dalziel was shaken with laughter, but the laugh was half tremulous.

"It is not altogether so easy, lad. Where was I? Aye—well, I had to die. It was to be that, or a life dishonoured. Never mind why. I was ready for it, when—God knows how—a tang of the sea wind in my nostrils, the song of a bird by Dean Water—well, well, never mind again. My blood tingled. The youth in me cried out. Devil take it, I couldn't die! Then I set my wits to work. Die I must, and die I wouldn't. I thought I'd solve the problem. Archibald Dalziel was to be found dead of his own act in his poor high chamber. A new man, Sandy Armstrong, an energetic, clever fellow, was to start life, clean, untrammelled, away in America. It was a simple plan. Only one thing indispensable: a suitable corpse. Now, you follow me? Now you see it had to be a red head of a kind. But I never dreamed of such a match as ours!"

Andreas opened his eyes. He was panting a little. Horror stamped itself upon his blanching cheek.

"Oh, good God!" exclaimed Dalziel suddenly.

“What are you thinking of? Am I the fellow to plot murder? Didn’t I plunge into the poisoned air to rescue you? That rascal, that scamp was—— But come, you, just free of the university yourself, you are not so innocent but you know we medical students must have subjects for anatomy? At home or at the hospital, what matters it? Well, that is the creature’s trade. I told you he was useful. Why, he’s Dr. Knox’s own particular—the great Knox, you have heard of him? We’ve all had dealings with yon Irishman at some time or other. ‘Dig me out the body of a decent lad with a red head,’ I said, ‘when you hear of one that’s gone. Get him up here at night. Put him into my clothes. Light the charcoal. Lock the door tight, and mind you lose the key. And I,” I explained, “will put it about that I am summoned to my great-uncle in England. And, by the time there’s at last a hue and cry for Archibald Dalziel, and they think of breaking the door down at the top of the land—why, if there’s little else left to recognise, there’ll be the red head to testify. You understand, now, I see. Take your sup, laddie, it’s the ghastliness has turned you.”

But Andreas pushed away the lemonade. He was painfully piecing the details together and filling for himself the gaps in the story, which indeed seemed to him ghastly enough.

“Then that man, the Irishman,” he began. “It was because of my red——”

The other interrupted him :

“Yes, the devil was in it! He could not hear of a red head—not a dead one, at least—high or low. The weeks went by. I had promised him ten pounds if the scheme was

properly carried through. The fellow thought, no doubt, I might go off my bargain. When he met you——”

“ Yes, indeed, I begin to see. My cap had dropped off. He looked at me very hard and strangely. And from that moment he clung to me.”

“ Aye,” pursued the Scotsman. “ Everything seems to have played into his hand. Stranger without friend ; the Sabbath quiet ; I, myself, as he believed, away. He would have sworn to me he had got you from the graveyard. When I found him on the stairs he gave a cry like a wolf in a trap. My word ! if he’d dared he’d have had the life out of me too. Cringing first, and wheedling—faugh ! But you have seen his way. ‘ Oi’d not loike ye to be lookin’ at him. Arrah, now, go back, sorr. Keep in hidin’.’ But I, you see, I had had good news. New life, sir, for Archibald Dalziel. My ancient uncle, who had sworn to disinherit me—but, again, never mind that now. ‘ No,’ said I. ‘ No more hiding for me, my man. I’ll give you your ten pounds, though, if you’ll take it away to-night. You can do a fresh job of it with Dr. Knox.’ ‘ But the charcoal’s alight,’ says the scoundrel. ‘ A bucket of water’ll put it out,’ says I. ‘ Oi wouldn’t loike your honour to see the ugly face of him.’ ‘ Hang it, man, do you think I’m afraid of a subject?’ I had swung my lantern into his face, and it was his ugly face, the look in his eyes, God knows what—but I saw it all, then : Oh, my God ! ”

There came a deep silence between the two. After a while Andreas put out his hand for his lemonade and drank ; then, setting down the

glass, turned his eyes once more to the window, through which life had flowed in upon him the night before.

It was the sunset hour. The glow caught the jagged fragments of glass in the wide-open casements. From this high-perched garret he could see the grey expanse of the New Town across the valley, and, beyond, catch a glimpse of sea and sails in the roadstead, and the distant curve of the opposite coast ; beyond, again, far away in the blue, the line of the Highlands. The great arch of sky, primrose at this hour, was still exquisitely pure. How fair and peaceful the prospect ! How placid and happy and prosperous ! He turned his gaze again into the room ; it seemed filled with a kind of ethereal sunset crepuscule. Friendly eyes were looking at him. Kindliness and care were about him. There was even now, he thought, a kind of pensive dignity about the degraded room with its remnants of past stateliness. And it was here—here, in this noble town, in this room now so hospitable, that treachery, cold-blooded plotting, unparalleled agonies, death, had lain in wait for him !

“ When, my dear Mr. Dallial, shall I, do you think, be fit to travel again ? ” he asked slowly.

Dalziel was quick to read through his thought.

“ In a hurry to go, mannie ? Well, I don’t blame you. Why, lad, a couple of days, perhaps. I’ll be sorry—— Don’t forget,” he went on quickly, “ it is not a Scotsman did it . . . I’m thinking,” he added, after a few moments’ pondering, “ that rascal of an Irishman, that fellow Burke, will come to a bad end some day ! ”

IV

THE SMILE IN THE PORTRAIT

THE SMILE IN THE PORTRAIT

DURING the whole of that boisterous autumn day I had been roaming the western side of Morpen Wolds. It is singularly wild, as you know. Mournful would be the better word to describe it. From the heath and the ragged upcrop of rock on the heights, to the neglected woods, the morasses and the fallow fields of the lower land, it is all and at all times equally desolate ; under the lurid storm-wracked clouds at the sunset hour it seemed all equally sinister.

But everything about it, aye, and about the day itself, fitted in well with my mood. I was in search of impressions for a certain weird chapter you wot of in my book.

Odd coincidences occur in real life ; so odd, indeed, that we would hesitate to use them in romance. One of these came across me that day.

It was just as I was scrambling down the face of a bluff into one of the treacherous ways which, in that remote part of the world, are still allowed to stand for roads. A sombre rain-cloud was bearing down from the north, and was already half way across the red afterglow. It urged the wisdom of seeking shelter, if shelter could be found anywhere near at hand : for my roadside inn was miles behind. As I was steadying myself after a precipitous descent, a name passed

into my mind—with curious suddenness and irrelevance—Champernon.

Now, I had not thought of Hubert Champernon for many a year. We had been what in one's young days one lightly calls friends. But, as I had known him, there was—or so he had impressed me—something so harsh, I might almost say so brutal, at the back of the man's intense vitality, that the intimacy between us could not ripen into real friendship. Indeed, it never outlasted our period of wild-oat sowing, the few months of silly dissipation about town we had gone through together. He seemed to thrive in that degraded life which had boded fair at one time to make a sot of me. Happily, we had drifted apart. I had cast that slough. For the last ten years anything that I knew further of him was by hearsay, and that was that he had well-nigh ruined himself by his irregularities.

What was it that brought the name back to me at such a moment? I was facing the wind, which tore through the furze and holly-bushes and filled my ears with a scratching sound. I had heard no footsteps, yet I turned round sharply. Barely two paces away was indeed Champernon. Had he not entered into my thoughts but a moment before, I probably would not have recognised him in the failing light.

He was standing quite still, both hands resting on his walking-stick; the capes of his overcoat fluttered about his shoulders. From under the peak of his travelling cap he was gazing at me attentively. Then, in a pause of the wind, came his well-remembered, strong voice:

“By all that is wonderful—Harle, no less! My old friend, Albert Harle! My word!”

He came forward, with a smile of gleaming white teeth, and shook my hand vigorously before I had well flung off the spell into which his fantastic apparition had thrown me. That crushing grip alone would have revealed the man. He had always been fond of asserting his remarkable strength, and, I believe, found enjoyment in the pain he inflicted by that trick of his on the unwary.

"You, in this wild country? Were you coming to pay me a visit at last, after all these years?" he went on, still with smiling lips, though I could mark that in his eyes there was nothing but cold curiosity.

"Truth to tell," I answered, "no. I did not even know you lived in these parts. But——"

At this moment a lashing of rain overtook us. He anticipated my demand, after a second's self-consultation.

"In any case," he said, looking significantly at the black pall overhead, "you must be my guest to-night. You can't help yourself. We are in for a storm of the first water, I promise you." He smiled again as he drew his coat closer round him. "Come. The house is only half a mile yonder."

And, without waiting for acceptance or refusal, he led the way briskly by a side path towards the woodland. Under the trees it was already night. The great voices of the wind choired in the high branches, which swayed, creaking and interlocked, yielding to the fierce gust the remnants of their dying leaves. In the midst of this mass of sound there was no talk possible—at least, on my side. But now and again Champernon's voice rose, seemingly without an effort, over the encompassing noise.

"We are not expected, you'll understand. I myself no more than you. But I've no doubt they'll manage to make you comfortable—at least, you'll be better off than in the open, with this sort of thing going on."

There had been a stupendous flash, under which every surrounding tree had leaped, livid grey, out of the darkness, seemingly struck still with terror. And, capping his last word, the crash of near thunder filled the air.

A moment later his accents reached me again in the same tone, as if answering the question which I had only formed in my mind.

"No ; as a matter of fact, they don't expect me back for some days. I've been abroad, but was able to return sooner than I had thought. They don't expect me back," he repeated.

A few minutes later he went on, in the manner of one who thinks that perhaps he ought to explain to a stranger what in his own mind is simple enough.

"In this out-of-the-way part of the world our post is mighty irregular—and devilish slow. A man travels faster than his letters. The coach dropped me at the half-way change, and I came across the moors on foot. Excellent lucky notion, by the way, since it brought about—shall we say providentially?—the rescue of old friend Harle from drowning like a partridge in the furrows ! Aha—ha ! "

We had emerged from the wood, and, through a ruinous iron gateway that swung noisily in the wind, were now entering the park—if park, indeed, could such neglected, furze-grown, thistle-infested acres be called—and in the open we found a remnant of twilight. The rain was

now falling in sheets. We were trudging along a desolate grass-grown avenue—or, rather, what had once been an avenue, for only a tree here and there was left standing; wind-fall and deliberate timber-cutting seemed to have done for the rest. Presently another flash revealed the gaunt outline of the house—an old-fashioned mansion, crowned with balustrades and urns; with evidently a vast amount of tall windows, some of which flung back the lightning fantastically, as if on the sudden opening of startled eyes. In the sharp illumination, it could be seen that the dwelling was as dilapidated as the portals of the demesne. A whole length of balusters, and more than one of the decorative urns, were missing from the outlines.

“Dismal sort of night this for the return of the weary traveller,” called out Champernon, looking round at me with his mirthless grin. And, expressing my own unspoken corollary, he added, “And a dismal sort of place to return to. At any rate, you will be welcome. We have but rare visitors, you see.”

He gave a laugh that seemed oddly uncalled for.

We turned round the house, and under its lee found a little respite from the howl of the storm. He ran up the steps that led to the front door, and—savagely, I thought—tugged at the iron handle of the bell. Whilst the clang was dying away within the house, I rejoined him, and for the first time put in a question.

“You said, ‘we,’ a moment ago. Who are ‘we’?”

“Just my old mother and my young wife.”

“So—your wife! I might have guessed, but I had not heard you were married.”

“ My good man—married ! Why, this is my second wife ! ”

He was reaching impatiently to ring again, when the door was opened by a grey-headed, wizened servant, who stood a moment peering into the uncertain light at the two bewrapped visitors.

“ Well, Gasquet, what’s the matter ? ” Champignon called out.

The servant jumped, and, exclaiming in a queer, whistling, startled voice, “ Why, it is the master ! ” hastily threw the other panel of the door open.

Upon a sign of somewhat peremptory courtesy from my host, I entered the sombre hall. He flung his drenched cloak upon a chair, and without a word relieved me of mine.

“ This gentleman dines and sleeps here to-night,” he said. “ See to a room for him with a good fire. Where is your mistress ? ”

“ In her apartment, I believe, sir. And her ladyship is in the dining-room. The fire burns there, sir—the boudoir chimney was smoking dreadful this windy weather, and had to be put out.”

“ Come, Harle, this way. I will present you to my mother.”

He led the way through the dark vastness of the hall into a long and low room—with north and west aspects, I noticed, for of the two high windows, across which the curtains had not yet been drawn, the one at the end was black with night, but the other, on the left hand, still showed some streaks of dim crimson afterglow.

By the fireside, oddly illumined by the leaping flames of the hearth, sat an old lady—very erect, in a straight-backed arm-chair ; dressed in black

silk, with white mittened hands resting on some neglected knitting work. Grey hair, arranged in stiff bandeaux on either side of a bony forehead, a high, sharp nose, a thin-lipped mouth, tightly compressed, and steel-light eyes, gave to a face, that once may have been severely handsome, the most strikingly hard expression that I ever saw in any woman.

This, then, was Lady Helen Champernon.

On her son's entrance she turned her head from the contemplation of the fire, but uttered not a word. Champernon advanced rapidly towards her, and, also in silence, raised her hand to his lips—with a show of old-fashioned courtesy that sat oddly on his wild-boar personality. The faintest smile flittered upon the old woman's face—the shade of a shadow. She looked up at him as he straightened himself, and then at me with quite inscrutable pale eyes.

"Mr. Harle, mother," he said, stepping aside ; "an old friend I met by lucky accident, who accepts our hospitality for the night."

And, as I bowed :

"Mr. Harle is welcome," she said, in an uninflected voice, and stared at me for a few moments.

Then she turned her head once more towards her son, and I thought to see a restrained anxiety gather into her gaze.

"Alice has just gone up, Hubert," she went on ; "we did not expect you so soon." He was now looking abstractedly down at the floor. "The portrait was finished yesterday," she added, "and Mr. Clavaroche was to leave to-morrow."

"Ah, yes, the portrait !" said Champernon.

His eyes sought the dark end of the room, where, following his glance, I distinguished, on

a slightly raised daïs, an arm-chair draped in some heavy cloth, and, by-the north window, the outlines of a bare easel.

"We had the picture hung in its place to-day," pursued the old lady, jerking her chin towards the opposite wall.

He took a few steps forward ; but, in the fitful firelight, it was impossible to descry anything more than the large oval gilt frame. At that moment the butler entered, carrying a heavy lamp. With a swift, almost angry, movement Champernon seized it and raised it aloft.

He gave a start ; then remained motionless, in silent contemplation. I drew near, and, over his shoulder, stretching my head to avoid the direct glare of the lamp, gazed at the delicious presentment of young womanhood that it revealed. So, this was Champernon's new wife !

It was, indeed, essentially a picture of youth—youth having just attained its richest fulness of bloom. This creature, Champernon's wife ! With its great, liquid eyes, wide-set under a smooth, low brow, with its tender, small mouth—such a mouth, I thought then, as Suckling lovingly dwells on in his description of "The Bride"—the face, at first sight, suggested the daintiness and innocence of Greuze's models. But the impression vanished, to give place to a kind of wonder. The heads that Greuze limned are full of a taking grace, but, arch or languishing, they never speak to the eye of aught more than mere prettiness. Here, under the lamp-rays, shone a thing of soul and life.

Of a truth, he was a marvellous artist who had fixed upon canvas the exquisiteness of that shy smile—faint, almost elusive—hovering about

the lips and the spark of rising joy in those child-eyes.

After a long pause, during which Champernon, the heavy lamp still at arm's-length above his head, had remained still as a statue, I murmured into the silence of the room :

" A great artist ! This is living—and here, in faith, is the smile of a happy wife. My dear Champernon, let me offer you my——"

But I stopped as he turned round. In the crude lamplight that threw weird shadows down the furrows of his cheeks, and under his thick, sensual lips, his face suddenly struck me as odiously repulsive. He looked at me a moment, but with unseeing eyes. Then slowly he placed the lamp upon the corner of the table and said, in a sort of muse :

" Yes, a wonderful artist. That smile is wonderful, as you say. . . . Yes, that was the smile. But for that smile of Alice as a girl, I don't think I would have married again. I, an impoverished man, a girl without a shilling to her name ! But there was that smile. I never thought to see the smile again ! "

He stopped, and I saw that—gradually, horribly—the white of his eyes grew red. With a kind of low growl in his throat, but without another word, he went out of the room.

As the door fell behind him, I turned to meet the old lady's inscrutable gaze fixed upon me. At last I broke the silence.

" This portrait of Mrs. Champernon," I said, " is really a wonder." Then, as she made no response, I went on to say something—anything—in this awkward intercourse : " He tells me, by the way, she is his second wife. How long has he been——"

“Not quite a year.” The words came cutting into mine in that strange monotone that had already impressed me so disagreeably. “There is his first wife.”

With a toss of the head, she indicated another oval framed portrait on the farther side of the dresser. I moved the lamp and looked.

What I saw there was a presentment almost as startling, although of a curiously different character. The woman here was in the plenitude of her dark beauty—in her early thirties, I surmised; the best years of life. But, in contrast with the other picture, for which a graceful simplicity of dress—fresh, delicate, almost girlish—seemed to have been deliberately studied, Champernon’s first wife displayed in full, jewelled, evening attire, bare arms and shoulders of ripe perfection. And the look in the wide, burning black eyes was one of almost inconceivable sadness; of haughty but hopeless misery. The corners of the mouth, young and firm and red-lipped as it was, had already that downward droop which tells of unrelenting bitterness. Yet, in spite of the brooding expression in eye and lip, the face, with its wondrous regularity of feature, under the crown of its glorious raven-black hair, was one of incomparable loveliness.

“Yes,” came the old lady’s voice, who, like her son, seemed to have an uncanny way of reading my very thoughts, “Hubert has a man’s taste for beauty. And he has been fortunate in the beauty of his two chosen. But,” she added, “not otherwise. That one died within two years—died of this dismal solitude of ours. How else could it be? Now, heaven grant that Alice——”

But here she stopped, and mechanically resumed her knitting.

At this moment the butler re-entered.

"There is a fire now in the Blue Room, my lady." The old man's voice came with a kind of irregular wheeze that recalled the sighs of the wind struggling through some ill-closed window. "I can show the gentleman up. I have laid out a change of clothing, sir, that may perhaps do, if you wish to remove some of your damp things."

With a bow to Lady Helen, I prepare to go, but she raised her head again and detained me by a look.

"Did I understand aright," she asked—"this visit, Hubert bringing you here with him to-night . . . it was all quite accidental?"

"The purest hazard," I answered.

"Then you did not travel up with him?"

"No, indeed. A chance meeting on the edge of the moor."

"Strange."

As she added nothing more, after a moment I followed the butler. The man had taken from the hall a flat silver candlestick, and was leading the way up wide, creaking wooden stairs; then through various corridors at right-angles to each other, all perfectly dark, chill, neglected. Strong blasts of the outer storm ranged their length from time to time, drawing the candle flame horizontally to a mere tongue of blue light, or, at the eddies of cross corners, shaking it almost to extinction.

The man went with the short, silent, sliding step peculiar to ancient butlers. With bent head, he seemed intent only on keeping his wick burning to the end of the journey. At last he

opened a door and introduced me to my room, where a wood fire—just lighted—was struggling, with but little promise of success, to keep itself alive in a very cold chimney.

"Dinner will be in half an hour, sir. You will hear the gong. I hope, sir, you will be able to find your way down. To the right, then two turnings on the left, and that takes you to the head of the stairs, sir."

"Yes," I said doubtfully enough. "I hope I will. It is a big house, I can see, and seems very empty just now."

"A big house to be sure—yes, sir. And would be more cheerful like with a big family and twenty servants—as in the old days."

"The old days?"

"Yes, sir. I mean Mr. Champernon's father's days."

"I see. And now—you must find it a little gloomy in the winter, at least?" I added euphemistically.

"Why, yes, sir," the man admitted dully. "No, it's not a cheerful place—in the winter. But one can get accustomed to most things in time—leastways, I can. I've lived here many years, man and boy. And maybe I'll die here, too."

With these somewhat cryptic words he withdrew, and I devoted my efforts to such improvement in my traveller's attire as circumstances permitted. And all the time, in the cheerless room, between the dismal wuthering of the storm outside and the depressing silence, that one could almost feel as one feels the cold, within the house, my thoughts rang the changes on the singular impressions of the last two hours. The odd meeting on the heath, the strangeness of this house in the waste, and its unexpected

hospitality ; the loveliness of the portrait of "black Champernon's" girl-wife—I remembered suddenly having heard in the old days that epithet applied to the man who certainly had then many dark corners in his mind—his unmistakable emotion, brooding rather than loving, as he had gazed upon it ; the saturnine countenance of the old dame, in which nothing could be read but a kind of watchful resignation to the bleakness of life.

At the allotted time I succeeded in finding my way back, guided by the raucous, pulsing sounds of a gong which was hammered with as much insistence as if it had to summon the numerous assembly of guests that the vastness of the dwelling suggested, and which, indeed, only waned into stillness when I made my appearance in the hall.

The company had already assembled in the dining-room. The lamp was still where I had left it, illuminating the pictures ; a small length of the farther end of the great table had been laid for dinner with five covers.

The old lady had not moved from her place by the fire ; but now by her side, on a straight-backed dining-chair, sat Champernon's wife. Her face was turned from the light, but I could not fail to recognise the figure of the portrait, so youthful and gracious. Upon that portrait, Champernon himself and another man, who obviously must be the painter—my fellow-guest—were even now gazing. They had their backs turned, black silhouettes against the lamp-light. On my entrance they moved apart, and Champernon called out :

" Ah, Harle, there you are ! Let me introduce you to Mr. Clavaroche."

I shook hands. The painter, whose name was not altogether unfamiliar to me, was a tall, straight, rather slender man, about thirty-five perhaps, with a blond beard cut to a point, a fine forehead, well-opened, brown eyes, that spoke both of wit and benevolence, although the brows were at that moment set into a frown of preoccupation. He struck me sympathetically.

"Mr. Clavaroché," Champernon repeated. "No one less. I am sure you know him by reputation. Anyhow, here is the limner of that masterpiece . . . that masterpiece of skill and, shall I say, of romantic imagination!" There was a repressed excitement in his voice and an ironical twist on his red lips which he seemed unable to subdue.—"Alice," he went on, "here is Mr. Harle, a friend of the younger days . . . the old days before I had settled down. Aha-ha! He did not know me in the character of the staid married man—the married man in the country."

The younger woman had risen, extended her hand—which I found icy cold—with a dejected, weary gesture. The light now shone full on her face, and I think I could not repress a start of astonishment. Here, of a truth, was the same pretty, young face of the portrait, but piteously white and tired; the same limpid, grey eyes, large and wide apart, but they showed undeniable signs of recent tears; the same adorable little mouth, but its corners, no longer curving faintly upward as on the canvas, seemed to tremble upon a sob. She tried, in her rôle of mistress of this weird place, to smile her welcome, but lamentably failed, and dropped her eyes. And Champernon looked on with his sardonic air.

"Alice is a little tired," he said, "and nervous, I find. It is the storm—the storm, of course, the thunder. Well, Mr. Harle will overlook our informal reception. Any port in a storm, as I told you—eh, Harle? And if you are half as hungry after this tramping as I am, you will no doubt put up with a family dinner. For Mr. Clavar Roche is already one of the family, after this long fortnight. I am sorry to have missed your company all this while, Mr. Clavar Roche. I should have loved to watch you, day by day, painting in that happy countenance." He gave a quick, burning look at the picture. "I should indeed," he repeated, like a snarl.

With a great show of solicitude, he now helped his mother to rise, led her to the head of the table, sitting down next to her. Mrs. Champignon, and we, the two guests, took our places at the sides. And thus began the most distressing, certainly the weirdest, meal in all my experience.

With the exception of the host, who talked incessantly with a kind of raging growl at the back of his voice, we remained all practically silent, each apparently oppressed by private thoughts.

"I hear that you are about to leave us tomorrow morning, Mr. Clavar Roche," Champignon resumed, after he had greedily despatched his soup and swallowed at a gulp the glass of sherry that the butler, moving around us in his ghost-like, sliding way, had just poured out. "I am glad, at any rate, that I came back in time to catch you. I am very glad. Before you go, you and I must have another talk about this portrait. Oh, it's a wonder, truly it is!"

He ate voraciously, emptied his glass almost as soon as it was refilled; and in the intervals

of devouring and swilling, kept up his flow of forced ill-sounding joviality.

“Burgundy! Burgundy’s your only wine for stomachs of mettle. Ah, the Volnay of the Maison d’Or—you remember, Harle? No, you don’t, I’ll wager! It never was of much help to you—aha-ha! I am a poor man now, but my father’s cellar is not yet dry, thanks be, of Burgundy. A poor man now. By the way, I stood to be a poorer one still, these three weeks back, Harle. And it was a devilish good job I did get across in time to look into things. Devilish good job!—Well, Gasquet, what’s wrong? Can’t you open another?”

He fell to an account, singularly uninteresting to me, engrossed as I was in present surroundings, of some swindling attempt upon property he held on the Continent. His presence, it seemed, had balked the machinations, and he spoke of his success with every token of elation. But it was easy to see that, in the midst of this pouring foam of words, his mind was alertly intent upon the immediate scene. While ostensibly addressing this explanation of his absence to me, his eyes roamed with a kind of inquiry, relentless and cruel, from his mother to his wife and his other guest. A shadow of anxiety passed occasionally over the old lady’s set face when her son’s voice rose to its morseurcous pitch. The frown of annoyance and perplexity which I had noticed in the painter’s countenance had deepened: it was now one of almost unconcealed anger. And the young wife, as if hypnotised by the glances of the man’s bloodshot eyes, sat as one palsied, toying with a piece of bread, neither eating, drinking, nor attempting to speak.

"And so, you see," Champernon concluded as he emptied a fresh glass, still addressing me but looking fixedly at Clavar Roche, "having settled those sharks over there sooner than I had the right to hope, I was lucky enough to return in time to meet again my old friend Harle—aha-ha!—ay, and to catch that admired painter, Mr. Clavar Roche—fill Mr. Clavar Roche's glass, d'you hear, Gasquet?—Mr. Clavar Roche, who, it seems, can divine a vanished smile! And you, Alice, come—*un doigt de vin*, my love! You seem to want a spur, you positively do. Come, am I not to see again that smile that Mr. Clavar Roche has painted—he cannot have invented it? If he has, it is one of those mysteries of art which, really, he'll have to explain to me—before he leaves us to-morrow. By Heaven he shall!"

Upon this last word, which had come out in a kind of spasm that bared the fellow's white teeth, the young woman shot a quick glance of fear at the painter, who answered by one of blank astonishment. The veins suddenly rose like purple serpents on Champernon's heated temples.

"By the lord——" he snarled.

But his words were drowned in an overpowering crash of thunder. Through the parting of ill-drawn curtains, the room was filled for a second with a dazzling phosphorescence, and when it had subsided again into the half light of the lamp, we found we had all risen to our feet, even the old lady.

"Lightning has struck one of our trees," she said without excitement; and these were the first words she had uttered at table. "Alice had better go up to her room," she added, in the

same uninflected voice. "This storm seems to have quite unnerved her."

And, indeed, Mrs. Champernon, fixing her husband with a look of terror, was trembling from head to foot.

The old lady gazed at her son a moment in silence ; then, taking her daughter-in-law by the arm, and, partly resting on her, for she walked lamely, partly drawing her on, slowly left the room. Champernon had, after a slight pause, collected himself again. He ran forward, and, elbowing the butler aside, opened the door himself, closed it, and returned to the table without a word.

Gasquet, who wore a troubled expression on his already dismal-enough face, placed the wine on the table, and we were left, the strangest trio, no doubt, who ever sat to share a bottle of port.

Champernon pushed glasses and decanter along the mahogany to the other end of the table, dragged forward a chair, and sat down, facing the portrait of his wife.

"We'll sit here," he said then, roughly. "We'll sit here and take in all the points of the masterpiece—it bears looking into. It must be looked into !"

After filling and emptying his first beaker, he filled again ; then, both elbows on the table, his chin propped upon clasped fingers, he fell into a deep abstraction.

Clavar Roche and I exchanged a look, the artist raising his eyebrows with a puzzled air. I drew my own chair up, and he followed my example. I reached for the decanter, and passed it on. Conversation of any kind in such circumstances was an impossibility. And, for something like an hour, we—three men fortuitously met in

this mysterious house—sat side by side in silence, gazing at the portrait ; communing with God knows what widely different strains of thought.

The clap of thunder which had so abruptly broken up the dinner company seemed to have been the parting shot of the storm. The roaring and rushing of the wind round the house had subsided ; and, after a time, even the patter of the rain ceased. There was a great stillness in the room, broken only by an occasional groan, half sigh, half growl, from our host—generally followed by the click of the decanter neck on his glass as he refilled, quite unconcerned about his guests.

Once or twice he shifted his bloodshot gaze with a slight change of expression—it was only, so to speak, a change of scowl—towards the portrait of the dead wife, but only to come back promptly to that of the living.

I had no inclination for wine ; nor, it seemed, had Clavar Roche. I produced my cigar-case, pushed it on to the painter—without asking permission from our sullen, unceremonious host. We both lit up, and proceeded with this bizarre, silent symposium in meditative smoking.

After another long spell, Champignon again gave one of his growling sighs, reached his hand for the bottle, and finding it empty, suddenly rose. As he did not speak, we did not move ; but, with a certain conscious defiance which I felt was the same in both our minds, looked up at him and went on smoking.

To me he paid no heed ; but, for a few seconds, his red eyes rested on the artist with that kind of fixed, unintelligent ferocity we find in those of a beast of prey. Then he turned, and—

even as once before that evening—went out like a man walking in his sleep.

Through the door, which he had left open, we could hear the creaking of the boards as he slowly walked up the stairs. I pictured him in my mind passing moodily along the long, empty corridors, all in the dark, like some wild beast in the galleries of its cave.

For the third time the painter and I exchanged a significant look ; and at last our silence was broken. Simultaneously the very same phrase came from our lips :

“ Can you explain ? ”

“ Not I, certainly,” Clavar Roche went on. “ I have never met the man before this evening. He was away when I arrived here. Correspondence only. And, on paper, he seemed sane enough. He had seen some of my work ; wanted his wife’s portrait by me. Singularly business-like, in fact, on the subject of price. But if ever one saw madness, madness of lust and jealousy ! Now, you, old friend as you are——”

I stopped him, to explain the nature of my acquaintance with this host of dangerous mood. Clavar Roche listened with a gathering concern.

“ Poor young thing,” he remarked pensively. “ I think I begin to understand. Life between that she-dragon, his mother—whom, by the way, though, I cannot quite make out : she’s odd, too—and that red-lipped brute—it was killing her. For many days, I must tell you, I only knew that little, lovely face as dulled by listlessness. I could hardly make up my mind to fix its misery on my canvas. You know—that sort of look we saw just before dinner. But one morning—I believe the few days of kindly sympathy she found with me raised her

spirits. I must have won her confidence. In short, one morning, at something that I said, I forget what, that pleased her, a smile came. Jove, she was transfigured! Then——”

As if suddenly struck by a thought that had never occurred before, the artist blushed slightly—and I loved him for this ingenuousness in one of his standing. He stopped with a self-conscious look, and turned to the picture.

“It was difficult to fix at first,” he resumed. “But, happily, she seemed, from that moment, to have been able to shake off her black melancholy, at least when she sat for me. I began the portrait afresh, and——”

“And made the smile live,” I put in. “The smile which Champernon thought—those were his own words—never to see again.”

The painter wheeled round.

“Said he so, indeed?” he exclaimed, like one who sees daylight at last. “You must tell me more. But we’ll be more comfortable in my room, if you don’t mind climbing so far away. I am at the other end of the building.”

With another look—proud, almost loving, I thought—at the picture, he blew out the lamp, struck a match, and lit two of the candles left in the hall.

“I’ve learned now to find my way in this dreadful mansion,” he said when, after endless turnings and ascendings, we reached his door. “Here we are. I can show you your way back when we’ve smoked another of those excellent cigars, if so be that you can spare me one more.”

I have spoken of coincidences, of unforeseeable, unlikely meetings, and the part they can play in life; quite as mysterious is the part that can be played by trifling, trivial circum-

stances in shaping events that must affect the whole course of many lives. Such an one was at hand now.

"Cigar—how tiresome!" I cried, for the prospect tempted me. "I believe I left my case on the table. But I'll go back——"

"And lose yourself and never be heard of again!" he laughed. "Go in and make yourself comfortable. I won't be long."

I entered Clavaroche's room. The fire was low; I made it up. I lit more candles, and looked about. There were many sketches on the table and on the chimney-piece—all of Mrs. Champernon's face; some with the desolate expression, others already showing a little of the radiance that marked the finished portrait. Clavaroche seemed a long time on his errand. I went to the window and gazed out. The storm had completely subsided, a full moon rode now serenely through a sea of high, silvery clouds. The outer world was all peaceful beauty, and I lost myself in it for a moment; it was a grateful relief, after the uncanny tension of the last hour. But, with the same suddenness as at sundown on the moor, the thought of Champernon leaped again upon me. I turned round sharply this time, with a startling sense of apprehension—and not a second too soon.

Within a foot of mine there was Champernon's face, glaring, foaming, distorted—the face of a raving maniac. He was leaning forward, his right hand stretched out horizontally, grasping a broad dagger of Oriental curve. An eye-blink, and it would have been across my throat. He recognised me, and jerked his head back violently, with a nightmare cry of rage. The pupils of his eyes widened, and, under a moon-

ray, gleamed phosphorescent. Inarticulately he mouthed :

“ Harle ! Then where’s that—where’s——”
And collapsed.

The huge form of the man lay for a moment or two, a mean, crumpled heap, at my feet, before I could gather thoughts of any coherence. Then, stepping over the body, I looked round for a bell—tugged at the rope. Through the cavernous depths of the house reverberated the clangour of the bell jerking on its wires. I was still pulling at the rope when Clavaroché rushed in.

“ What’s happened ? ” he cried ; then, catching sight of the figure on the floor, remained a moment in silent contemplation.

“ That,” he said at length, pointing with his toe to the outlandish weapon, “ was meant for me, I take it.”

“ Yes ; and you’ve had a narrow escape,” I answered, conscious now of a cold sweat on my face.

Clavaroché knelt by the body, stretched it flat on its back, felt for the pulse, and then laid his hand over his heart. He glanced up at me.

“ How did you kill him ? ”

“ I ? Good Heavens ! I never as much as touched him. He fell like an ox.”

The artist stared down at the swollen face.

“ Ah, I see. A burst vessel ! *Apopléxie foudroyante !* ”

The bell in the distance was still occasionally pealing a note, but fainter and at rarer intervals. In the returning silence we could hear shuffling steps draw near in the passage ; the tap also of a stick. And presently the tall, stiff figure of the old lady appeared within the open door.

She halted and looked in at us with that

severe, inscrutable gaze of hers. As her glance fell upon the purple-faced body, she gave a slight start, but it was almost imperceptible. Painfully, slowly, she hobbled in, and halted again, nearer. For a moment she kept her eyes fixed upon the cruel-looking weapon that had escaped from the dead man's hand; then she raised them to meet mine.

"Thank God!" she said.

The words at such a juncture were strange enough; but I read the mother's heart. So, no doubt, did Clavar Roche; he reached for the tell-tale dagger, rose to his feet, and, pulling open the drawer nearest to hand, hid out of sight the token of her son's murderous intent.

"A stroke, Lady Helen," he said; and meaningly raised his voice, for quick footsteps were now coming down the passage. "A sudden fatal stroke which overtook Mr. Champignon when he came up here for a talk with me—as he had announced."

She looked hard at him, then at me, and nodded.

"Thank you," she said, in her toneless way.

At the same instant Mrs. Champignon, barefooted, in a bedroom wrapper, her hair dishevelled, rushed wildly in upon us. Her eyes straightway sought the artist.

"Mr. Clavar Roche! . . ." She stopped, panting, caught sight of the dead man, and covered her face with her hands. "Oh, my God!"

"He fell dead," Clavar Roche called out in a loud voice. "It is the visitation of God."

A thin, whistling whimper came from the door; old Gasquet was standing, clutching the frame-post. He was staring at the corpse with starting eyeballs.

“ Oh, my poor master—my poor master ! ”

“ It is the visitation of God,” said Clavar Roche again. There was such a curious alteration in his accents that both Lady Helen and I turned our gaze upon him ; and both instinctively followed the direction of his flaming eyes.—They were fixed on the young wife’s white arms, bared by the falling away of the lace sleeves, and marked by the recent clutch of brutal fingers.

As if she felt our eyes upon the bruises, she shuddered, drew her wrapper close about her ; then, trembling, reluctantly took a few steps forward, knelt by the dead man, and laid a fearful touch upon his cold hand—the hand now powerless to torture or to caress.

“ It is all over, then ? ” she asked ; and looked up at Clavar Roche.

“ All over,” said he gravely.

It seemed to me a long while that she remained thus, gazing up at him as if he alone existed. He looked down at her. I think he, too, remembered no one else then.

“ All over ! ” she repeated, wondering.

The terror on her face had relaxed gradually ; and, for a spell (it was of the briefest, and perhaps none but myself noticed it) the corners of the lovely mouth lost their droop. Faintly a smile quivered—the smile that Clavar Roche had already fixed in the portrait.

V

THE BELTS OF GOLD

I

THE OLD HOUSE IN ALDERSGATE

BROTHER and sister sat looking at each other desperately by the light of the single dip candle, the flame of which rose and fell as if it were trying to reach the low, smoke-stained, raftered ceiling. They were singularly alike, these two young creatures. Both had clustering chestnut curls and bold, wide-open hazel eyes ; in each the short nose, round chin, and square-cut, passionate lips seemed sculptured in the same model. But the girl's hair was flung back in luxuriant disorder on her shoulders, while the boy's, cropped close behind, hung in crisp waves loose upon his forehead. She was wrapped in a dark cloak over her night garb ; he, attired in the extreme of the current fashion—from the soft cambric that swathed him to his ears to the buckle of the polished shoe. Clinging of kerseymere and silk stocking revealed all his slender, youthful grace ; the watches and seals at the fob of his high waistcoat and the extravagant cut of his long coat-tails stamped him the dandy. And, though both young faces were now pale, both set with misery, a marked difference the close observer might note in the expression of the comely pair.

The sister's agony of mind was mingled with

defiance. Courage was in her lustrous glance; the clasped hands did not tremble. The boy's outflung gesture was slack; there was hopelessness in his brooding gaze, vacillation in the droop of the mouth.

" 'Tis no manner of use, Pam; I'm done for—clean done for! There's naught for me but to go under! "

She drew in her breath sharply. The hands contracted still closer upon each other.

" What do you mean? "

" Disgrace, the sponging-house, or flight—a hiding hole somewhere, and starvation—or yet——"

" Don't say it, Harry—don't say it! " she panted at him. " I won't hear you say it! "

" I can't live disgraced, Pam."

" You shan't be disgraced."

" Well, then? "

" Uncle must! He must—he shall! Oh, Harry, he's not a bad man! "

" No! " cried the boy bitterly. " He's a demmed good man, and that's just why he'll not lift a finger to save a profligate like me. Gad, if he'd got a little vice about him anywhere I'd have some hope. You can spare yourself the trouble, Pam; he's finished with the prodigal. Why, did not the old alligator warn me that if I as much as crossed the threshold of his gloomy old house again he'd stop my wretched pittance? I believe he'd disinherit you, too, could he guess you'd let me in to-night; give all his money for the founding of a house of detention for juvenile criminals, as like as not—pious, canting, old——"

" Oh, hush, hush! " cried she. " He's hard, I know, but he loves me." She was pleading

against her own conviction of the truth of his words. "He does love me, and we're all the kin he's got in the world. He'd not see us both perish. Yes, both. If you go under, Harry—my own Harry—how can I——" She fought with her tears, then, rising, tossed her head with sudden energy. "And even if he does refuse, I'll find some other way. Yes, I will—trust me. Have I ever failed you yet, Harry? How cowardly, how foolish to despair when we've still so many days before us!"

"Scarce a week," he corrected. His voice and mien were sullen, and yet the acuteness of his distress had passed. Her strong nature had already reacted upon his weaker one.

"A week! 'Tis as good as twenty for a brave heart!"

She came behind him and flung her arms about him, the white, delicate arms that were to pull him out of the pit into which his own self-indulgence had cast him!

Pamela Cherryfield returned to her place at the table, and sat down once again opposite her brother. The hot, irresponsible blood of the old Kentish family which ran in her veins was mingled with the quieter city strain of the Wainfleets. If in recklessness and daring she was a true daughter of her father's house, she had yet enough of the shrewdness and balance of her maternal ancestors to keep her from the purposeless folly that was bringing her brother to misfortune—the last male scion of a self-ruined race! She was capable of plunging into danger from which she could scarce hope to escape, but it would be for no ignoble reason; hers was not the gambler's spirit, but the uncalculating courage of a high heart.

"You had promised not to join them over cards again," she said gravely now.

His full lips were thrust out sulkily.

"It's all very well for you to talk, Pam ; you're a girl ! If my uncle had given me a chance, if I'd been let choose a life fit for a man—for a gentleman ! If he'd bought me a commission—ah, Pam !—I'd have shown him what I'm worth ; but to set me in a black hole of an office to nibble at musty papers like a rat—oh, a fellow would have to be a saint to stand it, and not break out now and again ! You don't know how hard it is, how impossible——"

She sighed quickly.

"I am sure it is," she said then, with enforced gentleness.

"Uncle keeps me so shamefully short, too," he ended up fiercely.

"But, Harry, Harry dear, he did help you ! Twice he has paid. And now again—four hundred pounds !"

"Dash it, Pam, haven't I told you ten times already this night 'twas a trick, a monstrous cheat ! Sixty pounds was all I owed—sixty pounds, 'pon honour ! I might as easy have come by six hundred with my miserable pittance. I'd not a farthing, not a farthing till next quarter day, and a debt of honour, my honour, Pam ! Pshaw ! No girl can understand."

"But if you had come to me——"

"Yes. You would have screwed out a ten-pound note like last time."

She winced at the scorn of his tone, and at the memory of all that ten-pound note had cost her to obtain for him.

"'Twas then that rascal, that fellow, Jerry Morgan—Mr. Gerald Morgan, if you please, son

of a baronet and what not, a peg above such poor cits as you and I, Sis—'twas then he pretended to come to my aid. Confusion, Pamela, I sometimes think the two were in league, my Lord Eustace Vereker, whose noble hands held my worthless I O U, and Mr. Jerry, his friend—Jerry, of the Inns of Court, whom I believed my friend. Oh, well, well, never mind! Jerry came to me, all by way of friendship, mind you; wormed my misery out of me, offered to lend me the money, so I'd back a bill for him."

"Oh, Harry!" Brought up in a business house, she knew the portent of the dread transaction. "You didn't do it?"

"Ay, double-dyed fool that I was!"

"But—oh, Heavens, four hundred pounds!"

He dropped his head boyishly on his arms.

"What's the good, Pam? Don't I know? The fellow took me in with his promises; he swore it would be met long before it was due."

"Shameful!" she cried.

"Ay, you'd have said so had you heard him a little while ago! Confounded impudent of me, he said it was, to come to him about the bill. I hadn't even paid him back his sixty pounds! I was a nice fellow to talk to him of honourable obligations."

Pamela's face grew a shade paler.

"But you won't have to pay the sixty pounds, too?"

"I'll be dashed if I do!" he cried, jumping up with an energy, an air of determination and fire that she welcomed. The next minute despair returned to him. He fell back with a cry that maddened her.

"Well, there's a way out!"

She echoed it.

" Yes, there is, and I'll find it. I'll get you the wretched bill money, Harry. Yes, and the sixty pounds, too. I'll not have one of them say you owe an honourable debt. You can fling the dirty money in their faces. The little cit, do they call you? As if you weren't as well and better born than any gentleman of them all. Cherryfields of Maidley Abbot—where will they beat that? A little cit because of uncle here and me, I suppose. Well, we'll show them that the little cit can be more of a gentleman than those who, for all their fine names and titles, think it fair sport to plunder an unsuspecting friend. 'Tis uncle they would fain rob; he stands for so much riches all London over. Harry, I'll get the money for you—as I live I will—I'll clear you of your debt. Your honour is in my hands; I'll save it and you."

He could not but be infected by her valour, her warm courage.

" Sis, you're splendid! " he cried, and hugged her in schoolboy fashion. " I'll pay it back to you some day, Sis."

" Pay it back in one way," she pleaded, as she held him close. " Give up the cards and all those false friends."

" That I will," he promised her between two kisses.

And she caught up the flat candlestick to light him down the attic stairs.

II

“ CAPTAIN SMITH ”

“ FOUR hundred and sixty pounds ! What can you want, child, with four hundred and sixty pounds ? ” Surprise at first had robbed the old merchant of all other emotion. But the next moment a dark colour suffused his grey face. “ You’ve seen that scamp ! You’ve seen your brother, miss, against my orders ! He’s at his dissolute pranks again ! ‘ A fool despises his father’s instruction, and he that despises reproof shall die,’ Pamela. Hath not the Scripture said it ? ”

She faced him bravely, and it was no small test of courage to face Simon Wainfleet in a rage. Before she could collect her thoughts sufficiently for the pouring out of one of those eloquent speeches so anxiously prepared against this moment, his ultimatum was delivered.

“ Not a word, not another word, Pamela ! If I could come to your brother’s help now by lifting one finger, I would not lift it. If he were but a farthing in debt, I would not pay it. He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man.”

Then she knew it was hopeless, and that her first assault was doomed to failure even before she had so much as fired a shot. But in desperation she cried :

“ His honour’s at stake ! ”

“ His honour ? Pooh ! Honour ! The young jackdaw ! There’s but one thing will teach him, and that’s the pinch of necessity. Honour ! Each time he broke his pledged word to me, that was dishonour. ‘ Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord.’ ”

“ Uncle ! ” The wail broke from her. “ He’ll not survive it ! ”

He gave a laugh at that, bitter and scornful, got up from his seat, took her by the shoulders, and pushed her towards the door.

“ So that’s his game with you ? It’s like him. Tell him I’ll not pay his funeral expenses.”

Horrible as the words were, cruel, unnatural, even terrible as his attitude seemed to her, his touch on her shoulder was not unkindly ; his small, cold eye, as it fell upon her, had a twinkle of latent humour. She had said to her brother : “ I know he loves me.” She felt, even at this moment of anguish and revolt, that it was true. She had openly defied his commands, yet there was no wrath for her in his heart. But she took small comfort out of this knowledge. He loved her, but he would never yield to her. Never ! He had spoken.

As he went beside her, she noted that he limped, and that his face became twisted as with a spasm of pain. She recognised those omens. Fate had conspired against her. His gout was again upon him. Certainly it was no moment in which to expect leniency. He closed the door between them with a sharpness that spelt finality.

She had sought him in the little room off the counting-house where he spent the best hours of each day. Instead of returning to her own part

of the old mansion, she stood with her back to the office door, staring down the long, dusty passage.—A faint winter ray of sunshine pierced like a spear through the grime of the low, many-paned window that gave upon the inner courtyard. It served but to light up the dismal scene. To her left was the door leading into the counting-house. Behind its muffed glass panels lay the great room where, penned off, each under a high, dingy window, five clerks sat over the ledgers, checking and adding, day in and day out, the toll of the Wainfleet wealth. The girl's heart rose in revolt. What riches lay behind this sordid exterior! Out of them she knew that the wool merchant would no more miss the paltry sum necessary to ensure her brother's life and honour than she would the pin from her belt.

"I would not help him if I could do it by lifting my finger." That was what he said. The hard, grey-faced man had been as a sheer front of rock, and her pleading but the impotent dash of a wave against it. Anything she could do must break before him. How, indeed, could he understand the impetuous forces of youth, the young audacities of one suddenly emancipated from the thrall of that dismal, rigid house? That Harry should want to be gay among the gay, gallant among the gallant; to enjoy existence and spend money as other young men did, showed a criminal propensity to the old man's stern gaze. To Pamela it was a natural explosion of long-repressed energies. Suddenly she felt as if she, too, must rebel; as if she, too, could bear no longer the unrelieved dreariness, the cruel, iron discipline within the City house. Hitherto she had been patient and docile, not so much because of the natural helplessness of

her sex in such a situation, but because of her real affection for her relative ; of her gratitude, too, for the unhesitating character of his adoption of them in their need.

She knew that the welcome extended to them had been whole-hearted ; that the crusty old bachelor had taken them to his home as unreservedly as if, instead of nephew and niece, they had been son and daughter to him. Not otherwise would he have treated his own children had he wedded and begotten. There was no meanness in his thought towards them ; what galled their impetuous spirits was his stern attitude towards existence. He meant truly well towards them, even in his harshness. Harry had broken loose ; he had defied authority. If he was now cast off it was because he had chosen to go his own way rather than that marked out for him. His uncle had intended to make him his heir ; it was now probable that she, Pamela, could stand in her brother's shoes and inherit all, if she chose to continue in patience not so very much longer. Her nature was too generous to calculate the immense profit likely to accrue to herself from what need probably only be a limited continuance of her present existence. Even for Harry's sake—and what would she care for wealth if it were not for Harry?—such a thought must be flung from her mind. She cast it from her now.

“ Uncle laughed at me ! He laughed at me when my heart was breaking ! I am only a poor, impotent creature in his eyes, no more worth his anger than a mouse in a trap. I can't forgive him. I've done with him. I'll not bear it ! I'll save Harry and free myself at all costs. I swear I will ! ”

She lifted her young white hand and shook it towards the counting-house door.

At the same instant it opened ; and, ushered forth by the old head clerk, a gentleman, advancing quickly, nearly collided against her. He stepped back and bowed profoundly. Then the two stood staring at each other—Pamela blushing and paling, too utterly disconcerted to remember her manners and curtsy, and the gentleman very obviously struggling between an intensity of surprise and an equal intensity of admiration.

The stranger was young. He had dark eyes of a most piercing quality, and a clean-cut face that was at once strong, eager, and quiet. While the eyes seized and seemed to take possession of whatever came under their swift glance, the lines of the handsome lips were folded one upon the other, as if to prevent the passage of a single thought.

Mr. Woolcot, the head clerk, between whom and Pamela there had been, ever since her first entrance into her uncle’s house, a state of more or less active belligerency, regarded her with a shocked expression.

“ This gentleman has business with Mr. Wainfleet, Miss Cherryfield.”

He laid an emphasis on the word business. “ Young lady, what are you doing in these premises, sacredly reserved ? ” That was what look and tone conveyed. Instantly her eye defied him ; he was more than ever to her to-day part of the relentless machinery to which she had just sworn enmity.

“ I suppose I may have business myself with my uncle without your permission, Mr. Woolcot.”

She was about to pass by the unknown with

an equal scorn : 'twas naught but a city trader after all, in spite of that commandeering glance and those close-set lips of proud secrecy ! But the gentleman intervened.

“ Let me introduce myself, may I, madam ? Roland L'Estrange, of Downwich Manor, very much at your service.”

He placed his hand upon his breast and bowed once again even more deeply, then extended that same manly, brown hand towards her, with so bold and frank a gesture that, even had she wished it, she could not have refused her own fingers to its clasp. But she did not so desire it. The name matched the face very well, and the status of country squire it presumed, pleased her. She was also stimulated by the increased agitation of Mr. Woolcot, whose countenance behind the audacious stranger assumed suddenly an expression of horror and amazement.

“ I am Pamela Cherryfield,” she said, and was proud to bring out in her turn the good old Kentish name with its territorial association, alas ! now purely one of memory. And when Mr. L'Estrange raised her hand to his lips and, still holding it, swept her anew with that enveloping glance, she blushed, but by no means with disfavour.

The next moment some impulse as instinctive and maidenly drove her hurriedly down the passage towards her own quarters, her narrow grey gown fluttering with each step.

“ Captain Smith, Captain Smith ! ” ejaculated an agitated voice in the ear of the gentleman self-proclaimed as Roland L'Estrange. “ Captain Smith, sir, I—I understood you were Captain Smith. I have no orders anent anyone of the name of Mr. L'Estrange.”

The young man, who had been gazing after the slender figure, turned an amused glance over his shoulder.

"Captain Smith for business purposes, my good friend. Pray introduce me to your worthy master."

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Pamela spent the day in fruitless plots. Her ingenious thoughts ranged upon obvious impossibilities—to forge a draft in her uncle's name upon his banking account; to break into and rob his private cash-box; to open the chief cashier's desk and get possession of some papers upon which money could be raised. Not a whit did her conscience reproach her for such nefarious imaginings. The crime once committed, she was ready to stand up and admit her guilt. She would have no fear in action, nor remorse in success. Only, the mischief of it was there seemed no prospect of being able to put any of these brilliant schemes into execution!

Two or three times during the fast drawing in darkness of the afternoon she had stolen down to the forbidden precincts of the office and counting-house, listening at her uncle's door, hesitating upon another appeal; or half hoping that his gout might have driven him to his own bed-chamber, leaving the coast clear for her nefarious project. Some sudden movement within had driven her back each time. Upon the last occasion, indeed, a heavy groan sent her flying.

Towards the hour when the counting-house was preparing to close, she came down once again, moved by a new inspiration, perhaps the most imprudent she had yet conceived. Among

the clerks whose pens scratched so unremittingly on the ink-spattered desks was one Zachary Muckleblane, who was, her feminine perspicacity unerringly informed her, the most enamoured of the five love-sick young men. With him she happened to have more than the exiguous acquaintanceship, which the chance crossing of one or other of them upon the doorstep or in the street—a profound bow and a sketched curtsey—might be said to constitute.

Muckleblane was the son of her uncle's old housekeeper, and dwelt in the house ; he was an ugly, ungainly, lean youth, with a fiery crop of red hair and bright, roving, hungry eyes. His undying devotion she knew to be hers for all that she was so vastly above him—his master's niece, and a fine lady, likely to be an heiress to boot, and he but a shabby, striving clerk, keeping his distance, as was fit, and presuming no otherwise in their occasional meetings than by the avid gaze of his despairing eyes. The vision of him had flashed before her with sudden vividness as she sat in her attic, too miserable even to light her candle ; too agonised over her problem to endure the thought of the housekeeper's room, its cheerful fire and Mrs. Muckleblane's rambling discourse.

Pamela sprang to her feet and clasped her hands. If ever there was a creature for a forlorn hope it was Zachary !

For the fifth time that day she made the traject of creaking, winding stairs, passed through the endless ramifications of the empty old City house and down the main stone flight to the offices. Again there was a groan from her uncle's office, stifled, as she went by, into a scriptural prayer. But for that prayer her

heart must have driven her in upon the sufferer. Boldly she opened the door into the counting-house. The swinging oil lamps cast lurid yellow circles on the dirty boards. On each desk a tin candlestick held a candle for the special illumination of the partitioned-off writer. At the moment of her entrance one or two clerks had already extinguished theirs ; the smoking flax, wreathing out from under the extinguisher, filled the close atmosphere with reeking vapour.

“Miss Pamela !” ejaculated Mr. Woolcot.

The girl stood a moment, panting. It seemed to her as if the whole room had become full of eyes to stare at her ; brightest of all that pair from the fourth cubicle, where Master Muckleblane’s pale face peered from a den in darkness. But if Miss Cherryfield’s actions were wild and uncalculated, she had plenty of mother-wit to back them.

“Pray, Mr. Woolcot, I am in sad anxiety about my uncle. I could not rest all day seeing him look so ill. I came to listen but now, and he is groaning. Oh, pray, pray, dear Mr. Woolcot, hasten to him ! Had you not better send for the doctor ? Hearken !”

Mr. Woolcot, muttering something to the effect that gout was gout and young ladies were vastly liable to fuss, nevertheless hurried past the girl into the passage. And Pamela seized her moment.

“Zachary Muckleblane,” quoth she, in a clear, ringing voice, “your mother requests you instantly to come to her.” And with a further stroke of splendid mendacity, she added : “Come quick, sir, for I believe she has some urgent message for you—some remedy for my uncle’s sufferings.”

She slipped from the room and away towards the house with the utmost celerity, but she had not reached the inner hall before Zachary's tread was close upon her heels. All was dark about them, for regulations in Mr. Wainfleet's household were drawn within that nice limit of economy which edges on penury.

Pamela felt on the oak settle for the flat candlestick and the tinder-box which she had left ready for her hand, and set to strike a light with all speed. She had possibly the briefest space of time for her conversation with Zachary, and she wanted both to see and be seen during the course of it. When the long wick flared with a sullen yellow leap, she turned to the young man whose quick breathing she could hear just behind her. She gave one piercing glance at his countenance. It was livid and marked with curious flecks and depressions as if his flesh had been as wax to the fire of his agitation. She augured well for her purpose from this sight. Not only had he been swift to realise some crucial emergency underlying her summons, but he had been stirred to the very marrow that he should be needed by her.

"Zachary!" she whispered.

"Miss Pamela?" came the hoarse response.

They leant towards each other across the flickering light.

"I think—you once said, Zachary, you'd do anything to serve me."

"Anything!"

"Oh! Zachary. I want money, Zachary. I must have five hundred pounds. Hush——" Steps were coming along the outer passage, slow steps accompanied by the beat of a stick, and a low, groaning voice. "Impossible now.

If uncle sees me with you all is lost. To-night, to-night, Zachary, meet me at the foot of the attic stairs, late—between one and two. Hush. There’s the light under the door—say you’re going to your mother! Don’t fail me. Remember, I trust you!”

Swift and sure-footed she had gone from him. She was leaping up the stairs with scarce more sound than a flying kitten. He heard the faint closing of the passage door above. At the same moment his master appeared in the doorway, halting, his arm upon the arm of the old head clerk.

“I was told you were ill, sir. Hearing Mr. Wainfleet was ill, sir, I was on my way round to mother, venturing to hope I might be of some use, Mr. Woolcot, sir——”

“Ugh, ugh!” Old Wainfleet halted; then could bring out not even a further groan. In the spasm that seized him his face became contorted; he seemed to dwindle to half his size.

“Don’t stand staring like a jackanapes!” snarled Woolcot. “You’d have fetched your mother by this time if you’d a grain of common sense.”

III

MIDNIGHT COUNCILS

PAMELA had been determined not to close her eyes for an instant ; but she must, after all, have fallen into a fairly deep slumber, for it was with a great start that she awoke. The candle-flame was leaping in its socket, casting fantastic shadows on panelled wall and raftered ceiling. At first she could hardly realise that it was her own familiar room in which she found herself ; that, in the corner, yonder uncertain shape was only her little bed with the patchwork quilt ; that she was not held prisoner by some unknown instrument of torture, but was sitting, cramped, it is true, and stiff in every limb, yet all unharmed, in the old oak chair. Then she remembered, and grasped at her watch. It was scarcely past midnight. She drew a breath of relief ; she had still a full hour before the appointed moment. She lit a fresh candle, and sat down again. What had awakened her, then ? Why did her pulses throb so fiercely ? Why had she that sense of being called, wanted ? She got up, went to the door, set it ajar, and listened. The old house seemed full of murmurs and whispers. She gazed into the gaping depths of the stairs and felt it peopled with invisible presences. A gust of wind began to sing round

a jutting gable ; a low, deep rumble, hoarse and continuous, told how, far away, life was still going on in the great city : fine ladies—she pictured it to herself—being borne home in their coaches from brilliant revels, or young men of fashion hieing to and fro to those gaming-tables perhaps—those boards of disaster which had cost poor Harry so dear ! The girl felt singularly isolated, forlorn, in the echoing, whispering house. A sense of weakness, helplessness, came over her. The cold, the strangeness of the hour fell upon her spirits.

It was now that a mysterious thing happened to her. A face suddenly painted itself on the darkness before her—a face resolute and clear-cut, with eyes that claimed and caught her, and lips that were folded austerely over secrets of unimaginable sweetness. So vivid was the impression that she well-nigh called out, stretching forth her hand. The emptiness that met her recalled her swiftly to reality.

She went slowly back into her room ; the whole aspect of the plan she had so complacently evolved had changed. How hideous it was ! How could she for a second's space have contemplated it ? How would those eyes that haunted her have regarded her could they have read into her soul, and seen so base a stain lurking there ? What ! Bring ruin on a poor, honest youth ; make of his faithful, patient love for her a weapon with which to destroy him ! Oh, not even for Harry, not even to save her only brother, could she do this wrong ! She must think of something else. Ideas crowded upon her, impossible suggestions. It almost seemed as if spirits of evil were mocking her.

Then again she started. It was not moan of wind this time, nor rattle of cobblestone without ; not groan or creak of old wood or cavernous sigh of echoing passages. From the deep stillness of the house, what arose to her ears was the sound of steps and the snap of a closing door. Instantly a new fear was upon her. She remembered her uncle's face of pain, the groans that had been wrung out of him in the silence of the office room, and by the agony of each tread. What if he were suddenly worse ? What if the gout had flown to some vital spot ? She had been plotting to rob him, she had sworn defiance to him, but now she knew that she could not bear him to die ; that, after all, she loved him. She determined to go down to his room and satisfy herself as to whether these stirrings foreboded a sudden mortal seizure or merely an increase of the usual symptoms. Any action was a relief after her distracting cogitations. She picked up her candlestick and went softly.

At the entrance of the passage where her uncle's bed-chamber was situated she slipped off her sandal shoes and proceeded with no more noise than a moth till she reached his door, where she paused to listen.

A colloquy was proceeding within, low-toned as behoves midnight colloquies, but carried on in eminently quiet, everyday accents. Whatever had brought old Woolcot at this hour to his master's side ? It was neither deadly illness nor, it seemed to the girl, business of extraordinary importance.

She was preparing, mentally shrugging her shoulders at herself for her feminine nervousness, to retrace her steps when the sound of two

words arrested her. The words were "Captain Smith." A sudden impulse seized her. She snuffed out her candle between two bold fingers, and drew closer to the panel to listen. Yes, this was her uncle speaking, and what he was saying referred, right enough, to Captain Smith, or, rather, to Mr. Roland L'Estrange, the stranger with the bold, seafaring eyes and the close mouth, whose strong personality so singularly haunted her; about whose dual nomenclature there was already an arresting atmosphere of mystery.

"I have full confidence in Captain Smith," Merchant Wainfleet was saying.

His voice was raised a little, as that of one who resents a doubt upon his judgment; and he had evidently made some quick movement, for he ended up with an exclamation which betrayed pain.

"It is not that I should venture to criticise your arrangements, Mr. Wainfleet, sir," came the clerk's voice humbly. (He was always very humble with his master. "Mean old fellow!" Pamela stigmatised him in her mind.) "But so large a sum being at stake this time, and not having known this gentleman as bearing another name, and it having struck me, sir, I must confess, as rather imprudent of him to introduce himself in that manner to the young lady in the circumstances, sir——"

To the girl's surprise her uncle gave an unmistakable chuckle.

"Oh, ay, the young lady! My niece, you mean. That was a curious meeting of theirs, Woolcot. One of those things, one might say, pre-ordained. Tush! You're a good and trusty servant. You do well to conceal nothing. But

my agent, Captain Smith, hark you, Woolcot——”

Here the two must have drawn close to each other for the passage of some secret too important to be confided even to the silent night and a sleeping house, for no sound penetrated to the listener but a confused murmur.

Pamela's curiosity mounted overpoweringly. What could these pillars of respectability and eminent virtue be conspiring together in this manner? How came Captain Smith, or Mr. Roland L'Estrange, into such councils? Why was her uncle pleased that he and she should have met? Oh, she must know; she must contrive to probe this mystery to the bottom! It seemed to her that her own fate was wrapped up in these strange, hidden doings—ay, and her brother's, for, indeed, once the secret in her possession, might she not have a weapon of power to wield for Harry's sake?

There was a cabinet off her uncle's bedchamber where Mrs. Muckleblane stored her master's wardrobe in some old trunks. She remembered that the door which opened into the bedroom was of the lightest description; that it had glass panels before which hung moreen curtains. She had helped the housekeeper to lay by some winter garments in camphor there last summer. She had peered into her uncle's sombre bedchamber through these little windows, and the dusty smell of the curtains was still vivid to her nostrils. How well might she not both see and hear from such a coign of vantage! She paused not a second for timorous reflection, but felt her way along the passage wall until the handle of the cabinet door was in her grasp, and then with infinite precaution turned it. A faint ray

of light penetrating through the curtained panel guided her. She stepped across an old valise, skirted the dangerous angle of a huge hair trunk, and found herself against the door of communication. The voices within the room were now quite distinct. Her heart beat high as she applied her eye with great precaution to the slit of the curtain.

Mr. Wainfleet was sitting in a great armchair, wrapped in a dressing-gown. He was propped up by cushions ; the gouty foot, bandaged and supported by a pillow, reposed upon a chair in front of him. The old man's face was vividly illuminated by a couple of wax candles in heavy silver candlesticks, placed close together on a table beside him. It looked terribly grey and drawn, but the alert gleam of the eye and the firm lines of the mouth showed spirit triumphant over suffering. Kneeling close to the armchair was the old clerk. His back was turned ; but, by the movement of his shoulders, she could see that he was busily occupied.

Her own name was the first word to catch her ear distinctly.

" To escort Pamela," her uncle was saying.

The clerk's grey head was jerked upwards. The movement was one of surprise.

" Miss Pamela, did you say, sir ? "

" Yes, Woolcot. It is Captain Smith's suggestion. I confess I think it a reasonable one. I would have conducted her myself had I been able to do so. As he truly pointed out to me, there would be less suspicion attaching to the journey this time of year if it should coincide with a Christmastide visit. In the circumstances, however, nothing could be more natural, as Captain Smith remarked, than that the young

lady should not be deprived of her pleasure. It would set your busybody lads in the country house gossiping if you went alone, Woolcot ; but if you go as escort to my niece, and do a bit of business for the house at the same time, there can be no cause for surprise, or excuse for prying. Ay, ay. 'A prudent man concealeth knowledge.'"

Woolcot's shoulders were moving again, his wigged poll was bent.

"Then it is your wish I should escort Miss Cherryfield in your stead, sir ?"

"Yes, Woolcot. 'The hand of the Lord hath touched me,' as holy Job saith. 'Poor human worm that I am, who am I to resist Divine dispensation ? I submit, O Lord. My comings and goings are in Thy keeping ; not for that will I withdraw my hand from the plough. The work that I have undertaken shall not be left undone.'"

He drew a long breath ; his voice lost itself in a faint hiss of pain.

Falling from one wonder into another, and feeling the mystery thicken ever deeper about her, Pamela saw the clerk rise to his feet, holding in both hands a long canvas belt which seemed to be heavily weighted and bulging all along its length. With this he moved towards the back of the room out of her sight, revealing on the spot near where he had knelt three canvas bags, one of which, half opened, displayed its contents. They were gleaming yellow in the candlelight.

"It's gold !" thought the girl. "It's gold ! And that belt was stuffed with gold ! What can it mean ?"

Her uncle's eyes were closed. She saw his lips moving, and guessed him to be stimulating

himself against his suffering with texts of Scripture. For all his piety, she had a sudden conviction that he and his old clerk were scheming some dark and uncertain enterprise. Woolcot's next remark from his unseen corner of the room, confirmed her suspicion :

"That's twelve hundred between the two belts, sir."

Mr. Wainfleet opened his eyes. They looked unnaturally alert in the livid countenance.

"It is my intention to make the venture rather bigger than usual," he announced in a determined voice, very different from the languorous drone of his Biblical commentary.

"Indeed, sir?"

Woolcot came into the range of vision. Pamela saw his rugged profile against the light. Disapproval was on that out-thrust nether lip.

"The latest orders are very severe, sir. The Preventive are increasingly on the alert just now. Since you are unable to conduct operations yourself, why not at least limit the risk?" He broke off; the old merchant's face was convulsed between pain and anger.

"I'm doubling the usual stake. Captain Smith takes over thirty thousand this time. I stake six thousand of it; six thousand, not a guinea less. This may be the last chance—and the best. The new French king must have gold—and is ready to pay the price. Premium has never been so high: thirty-two francs, Woolcot, in French Royal bank-notes, for every guinea! That is the price Captain Smith quotes for this venture—a gross profit of thirty-three per cent., mark you! That's two thousand pounds for my stake. Take away five hundred for Captain Smith's quarter-share—fifteen hun-

dred net profit! Just for two days' risk and anxiety. The best terms we've had yet. Pshaw! 'If a wise man contendeth with a fool, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest.' "

In spite of this rebuke, there was obstinacy in every line of the old clerk's figure.

"I will make so bold, Mr. Wainfleet, sir—nay, I should not be your faithful servant if I did not lift up my voice. I have the gravest misgivings. The deed is rash in the extreme. It is not that I fear the risk for myself. The house has had me, body and soul, from boyhood, sir; I'd give my life to serve it. But this sudden illness of yours, Mr. Wainfleet, does it not seem like a warning from Heaven? Why not defer——"

"Not an hour."

Pamela knew the jut of her uncle's jaw, and wondered how Woolcot had dared.

"The gold must be at Hougham Cave on Saturday at the turn of the tide. That's been settled. These are my orders. See that you obey them."

It was not that the master's voice was louder, but there was something in its tone, something in the flash of his indomitable eye, that conveyed a weight of reprobation, under which the servant literally cringed. After a moment Woolcot said humbly :

"Day after to-morrow then, sir."

A flickering smile crossed the merchant's compressed lips.

"Yes, there will be a new moon. The weather is improving. Everything is in favour of the run. Order a hired coach, nothing ostentatious. Four out of the half-dozen sea cases in the cellars will serve our purpose best. You will pack

them yourself. Three belts in two of them, two in the remainder. Each belt towards the bottom of the case ; surround with loose cotton ; fill in with samples for the Indian market. You can give it out you are to meet a French gentleman—a gentleman from Lille—on business at Folkestone. The extra weight in the cases will not attract suspicion ; the lead lining and the iron clamps will account for it. As for my niece—— What's that ? ”

The door had creaked as, imprudently, Pamela pressed closer to it, eager not to miss any reference to herself, for the old man had dropped his voice. Paralysed she now stood, her heart beating so thickly she feared its pulsations must inevitably betray her. But Woolcot said soothingly, after a second :

“ 'Tis a stormy night, sir, and the old doors rattle. I had best continue to fill the belts.”

He reached for another canvas bag as he spoke, and in so doing overset the chair upon which the packages were laid. Under cover of the noise and the invalid's impatient outcry, “ Tut, tut, you'll wake the house ! ” Pamela slipped out of her hiding-place into the passage. Her uncle's glance round the room warned her that he was on the alert.

She felt her way to the passage, cautiously as she had come, and safely reached the attic stairs, where, feeling suddenly as if her knees were giving way beneath her, she sat down in the dark and fell to thinking.

The exact nature of a transaction which had to be conducted in so secret, not to say furtive, a manner remained a mystery to her. She knew nothing of guinea smuggling, that audacious trade between English gold and French necessity,

which was carried on under the very nose of his Majesty's edicts and the closest official watchfulness. But it was plain that her uncle was engaged upon some traffic against the laws of the land, and that an adventure in connection with this traffic was about to be launched which old Woolcot characterised as risky in the extreme. The girl's lip curled. And this was the stern, self-righteous man who had no mercy for her brother's harmless, youthful follies ; who would not lift a finger to save his life or honour ! A moment she was prepared to think her aged relative guilty of the direst wickedness ; but presently she remembered that the leader of the venture was none other than the man with the double name and the piercing glance. All thought of treachery or evil vanished from her mind, to be replaced by vague, romantic pictures of daring deeds on moonless waters ; of secret treasure ; of the cave tryst and herself, Pamela, mysteriously and thrillingly intermingled with the drama !

When her cogitations reached this point she deliberately lit her candle again, established herself a flight higher on the attic stairs, to await Zachary's appearance at the rendezvous. Even as she did so a single solemn stroke from St. Thomas's, the old church by Charterhouse, fell upon her ear. She heard it repeated on more distant bells ; and then the City fell into a wind-swept silence, ever less frequently broken by rumble of passing cart or belated footfall. One o'clock ! " Come late, between one and two." This had been her careless order. " He will be here at half-past one," she said to herself decidedly, with a swift intuition of the meaning which his Scottish precision and his burning

ardour to serve her would dictate to him. She had still half an hour to plan her course of action.

The conclusion she had come to before the recent successful reconnoitring was now confirmed. Zachary's services must be dispensed with. Not only had she an increasing horror for the idea of basely embroiling the poor clerk in her mad enterprise, but she now realised that to do so would be the betrayal of her uncle's most private matters. Besides this, no doubt, even to the most noble nature there is an additional impetus towards good when evil becomes unnecessary. She had heard enough of her uncle's secrets ; she could act for herself. By some odd, singular, delightful freak of luck she was actually brought into the game. Audacity would not be wanting for the playing of her part. It meant but the securing of one of the ten belts out of those trunks—trunks, ostensibly, of travellers' samples : in reality, cases of hidden treasure. Each belt contained six hundred pounds, and she wanted less than five hundred to save Harry ! Her spirit rose, giddily circling ; and it seemed to herself, as she sat in the cold with the great night all about her, that her soul was singing like some lark in dazzling circles of light.

To save Harry ! It was her dearest wish ; but, mixed up with it, there were fleeting visions of the dark, clean-cut face, of Mr. Roland L'Estrange's eyes as they had enveloped and held her. She remembered rosily the touch of his lips on her hand, the ring of his deep, musical voice. She knew she was to see him again. She knew that he was the pivot of the whole undertaking. Dark, rash, mysterious, desperate, and alluring ! He had asked that she should be

sent to this unknown destination, upon this Christmas visit which innocently covered so much intrigue. It seemed to her their fate was from henceforth commingled. There was no fear for her in the thought ; rather a strange exhilaration.

IV

OTHER MIDNIGHT DOINGS

ZACHARY came creeping up the stairs, stumbling. He, too, was unshod. He carried a dark lantern in his hand and lifted it when he came in sight of the waiting girl, so that the escaping shaft of light struck his face. Pamela thought she had never seen anyone so ugly, and the last nail in her determination to dispense with him was riveted with contentment. Yet she had called him to her aid. Another might have found that the situation presented difficulties. Pamela was young and ruthless. She was not one to beat about the bush. She did not even give him time to address her.

"Zachary," she said, "I'm sorry I asked you to come here. I have done very wrong. Whatever difficulties I may be in I must not involve you in them. I will not be your ruin, Zachary."

So noble did these words sound that she could not but feel nobly as she spoke them. Her full, lustrous eye was upraised towards him, charged with solemnity. She sat clasping her knees, her pretty stockinged feet pressed close together on the step beneath her.

He could scarcely speak at all, so urgent were the feelings that oppressed him.

"Oh, Miss Pamela!" He wrung his hands

together, the lantern between them, and the vivid ray danced wildly up the panelled wall and was lost in the heights of the staircase above them. "Oh, Miss Pamela, dinna say that. Dinna tak' back your word, Miss Pamela, dinna blight the only joy you've ever given me! Ruin for you, Miss Pamela, wadna that be—oh, Miss Pamela, wadna that be just the grandest——"

He was coming closer to her, still wringing his bony hands, still shaking the lantern, still in her eyes the ugliest being they had ever beheld. But something of desperation in his air smote her with a vague alarm. She sprang to her feet.

"'Tis useless, Zachary, I have reflected. Besides, you cannot help me. I have made other plans. I—I don't want you," she blurted out finally with a cruel frankness. "I'm sorry. Good-night!"

She had sprung to her feet and was flying upwards, terrified to hear his muffled tread after her. The mad fandango of the lantern beam seemed to encircle her, his panting words were in her ear.

"I'll not gie it up. I'm no' the man to go back on my promise, Miss Pamela! And if I get you the five hundred pounds, what then, Miss Pamela? Miss Pamela, will na ye bide a minute. No but a word, Miss Pamela——"

She turned and faced him on the landing.

"For shame, Zachary! How dare you? Your master's niece—and I who trusted you! How dare you follow me? Go back this moment! I see! I see!" she cried, cunningly aiming her arrow. "I ought not to have trusted you."

"Do you say that to me?" said he. He put his lantern at his feet, and stood with folded arms, his chin on his breast, looking at her darkly from under his eyebrows. A breathless, lovely creature she was, blown as by contrary winds, half fiercely rejecting and thrusting him from her, half wavering towards him, conscious of her own unkindness.

"You oughtn't to be so tiresome," she said pettishly. "A person may change her mind. I—I have changed my mind."

"I haven't changed mine," said he abruptly, "and so ye'll find in due time, Miss Pamela."

He picked up his light and went down the stairs away from her.

She remained, staring after him doubtfully. Of a sudden he had seemed quite changed, no longer shambling, eager Zachary, mad in love, but a man, a man with a purpose, strong and self-controlled.

"Now, what can he mean?" she asked herself half aloud. But she shook off the uncomfortable sensation quickly. What did it matter? She had freed herself of him; she had no further responsibility in the matter. She could spare no time to ponder over Master Zachary's silly purposes. She had further work to do to-night.

When the last heavy, wadded footstep and responsive creak of ancient wood had given place to stillness she went to the attic chamber next her own. It had once been Harry's. Even to-night, full of her own scheme, her heart was gripped at sight of the empty room. How she hated the desolation of this abandoned sanctum! That sheeted bed, those huddled, meaningless bits of furniture—The life had gone out of everything; it was a place of the

dead. Quickly she marched across the echoing boards to the object of her search, Harry's old trunk. Pray Heaven he had not locked it. No, careless boy! How blessed for her plans at this moment was this carelessness! How blessed for her, too, the extravagance that had made him discard so much excellent apparel, because of its plain country fashion! She opened the great nailed lid. It swung, creaking, on its rusty hinges.

Ah! here they were—the buckskin riding breeches, the high boots, the grey cloth riding coat, and the rough roquelaure which she remembered the fastidious young gentleman qualifying as only fit for Nunky's bagman. As she removed these garments one by one from the depths of the box her hand struck upon the corner of something hard and sharp, and with an exclamation of pleasure she lifted out a square, polished mahogany case, brass-bound at the corners. Squatting back upon her heels, she opened it. Her father's pistols! Harry had been so proud to own them once, yet she supposed they, too, must have fallen under the ban of the old-fashioned. Well, she could not pause to regret this want of filial piety now—she who had been wondering how she could secure for herself this important asset in her desperate enterprise.

Her whole plot suddenly sprang up before her, armoured and panoplied. A gallant, dashing, ruffling rascal. Her heart swelled. She felt proud of this creation of her own courage—proud and a little afraid, but ready to back him up to the uttermost venture.

“A beaver to cock,” she murmured, as she rose to her feet, opened a drawer of the mahogany

tallboy, and flung the hat it contained on her own head at an angle which of itself proclaimed the knight of the road.

Laden with her spoils, she returned to her room. The best way of concealing the result of her raid was to pack them at the bottom of the trunk and some of her garments on top ready for the start to-morrow.

Janet, the little red-cheeked maid, would be the last to investigate why her young mistress should begin to pack before she was warned of departure, and if she did, it was easy to say that Mr. Wainfleet had spoken of the matter in her hearing, and Gospel truth besides.

She went through an anxious moment upon finding that the pistols, although in perfect condition, oiled and unruined, and fitted with fresh flints, lacked ammunition. True, it had never entered her intention to make murderous use of the weapons upon anyone—least of all upon the venerable Woolcot—but to menace with empty barrels was a futile proceeding, even to oneself, and she quite thought that the firing off of a couple of shots harmlessly about his ears might be required if it should come to her having to play the footpad upon her uncle's emissary.

A renewed search in the empty bedroom next door resulted in the discovery of an old hoard of powder and shot. And she was able to load and prime her father's honourable weapons to her own satisfaction. She had no girlish fears on the subject of firearms. Many a time, in her country-life days, she had amused herself with these very Mantons ; and beaten Harry, too, at the target, much to her sporting father's delight.

It was past four by all the City bells before Pamela laid her curly head upon her pillow ; and —oh, spring of vital youth !—ere scarce another minute had fallen away she was soundly and blissfully asleep.

Zachary, his teeth set till his thin lips almost disappeared in a single grim line of determination, went doggedly down the stairs till he reached the kitchen landing.

He was about to betake himself to his truckle bed, in the dark closet next the china cupboard, dignified by the name of " Zachary's bedroom," when sounds approaching from the master's side of the house made him pause. He set his lantern on one side, drew his threadbare sleeves a trifle more back from his bony wrists, and balled his hands ready to spring. To grapple, struggle with, and belabour some thief in the night would have been an admirable relief to him in his present mood. Moreover, a swift vision of the importance he might gain by heroic action in the defence of the house of Wainfleet rose in vivid colours before his mind, to be shattered the next instant by the appearance of his very respectable superior, Mr. Woolcot.

The old clerk, a flat candlestick in one hand, a couple of bundles which seemed a great weight clutched to his chest, was shuffling along, shaking his head, and talking to himself. As he came into view of Zachary's light he halted, and started so violently that burden and candle simultaneously escaped his grasp and fell to the ground, the one clattering, the others with a dull thud, and odd metallic chink.

" 'Tis I, Mr. Woolcot, sir ! Don't call ! " cried Zachary. " Don't be alarmed ; 'tis only I, Muckleblane ; I—I——"

“ Muckleblane, Muckleblane ? ” The head clerk was irascible at the best of times. He now entered upon an inconceivable state of agitation, placed himself before the objects on the floor, and frantically waved back the other’s advance. “ And what the devil are you doing here, Muckleblane ? Very suspicious, very suspicious ! Tut, tut, away with you ! None of your interference ! I don’t want your help. How ? How ? What do you say ? ”

“ Won’t you let me assist you to pick up the gold, sir ? ” said Zachary in a curious voice of contained excitement. “ It’s escaped from the belt at your feet, Mr. Woolcot.”

“ How ? How ? ” said the old man again.

He looked down at the tell-tale gleam to which the ray of Zachary’s lantern pointed like a warning finger.

“ Dear, dear ! Tut, tut ! ” He swallowed two or three times ; then, in an altered tone : “ I am bringing the coin down to the safe from Mr. Wainfleet’s room, Zachary. I—we have a large stock of specie in the house just now, and I did not wish the matter talked about.” His accents grew firmer. “ Mr. Wainfleet desired me to conduct the affair as privately as possible. To-morrow ’twill be lodged in the bank.”

“ Yes, Mr. Woolcot,” said the junior humbly. He was on his knees already, gathering the sovereigns together into a heap between his palms, and stuffing them into the gaping pocket of the belt. “ Yes, sir, I meant no harm, sir. My mother was anxious about Mr. Wainfleet, and bade me keep on the watch. I haven’t been to bed all night, sir, and hearing a noise——”

“ Yes ; good lad, good lad ! Give me that.

I'll take your lantern ; you can keep my candle. To bed, Zachary ; to bed ! ”

The old man turned towards the passage whence he had just emerged, halted, and rather staggeringly wheeled round once more.

“ A silent mouth, Zachary, brings a lad further in life than ever did a wagging tongue, mind that ! I've got you in my eye.”

There was both promise and menace in the last words. With shuffling steps he withdrew along the great stone passage.

Zachary took flint and steel from his pocket, lit the fallen candle, and stuck it back into the candlestick. A forgotten sovereign winked at him from the corner where it had rolled. He weighed it in his left hand, while a smile began to creep over his countenance.

“ Bringing the coin from the master's bedroom to the safe—round by the kitchen—at two o'clock in the morning ? ” said he musingly.

Then his heavy eyebrows, almost startlingly red in the sickly pallor of his face, drew together in profound reflection. He walked across the flags to a gaping archway which led to the range of cellars below the kitchen basement. It was to these secret recesses, always carefully locked, that Mr. Woolcot had been bent with his treasure. Zachary belonged to that not infrequent type of humanity akin to the ferret, who find a zest in following the trail of a mystery for the mere personal satisfaction. He had now a strong motive to stimulate him.

“ I've had ma doots these whiles back,” he said to himself. “ Hech, and I'm fair sure the nicht ! ” He weighed the coin again, and slipped it into his pocket. “ Guinea smuggling ! ” He turned up his eyes ecstatically. “ Eh, my

bonny Miss Pam, ye kem to the richt man when ye kem to poor Zachary ! ”

With buoyant steps he betook himself to his dreadful room. His fierce heart was singing as once more in the dark he sat himself down on his pallet to listen and watch with a deadly patience, through the crack of the door which he had left ajar. He knew himself ill-favoured by nature and by fortune, and his ambition was as pure as it was intense. To win a smile, a word of thanks ; to have served her ! After that, he caressed the thought of death at her feet. It had been the passionately coloured vision of all his youth.

V

MADAM L'ESTRANGE

PAMELA'S first evening at Downwich Grange remained in her memory as a confused, many-coloured, slightly fevered, but, on the whole, delightful dream.

It had been a weary, long journey through driving snow and sleet. From the very start almost the whole countryside had been hidden from her view by whirling, dazling atoms; after the winter darkness had closed about them, the yellow glow of their lanterns still illumined nothing but the myriad dance. Mr. Woolcot was a nervous fellow-traveller. It was his ostensible mission not only to escort the young lady to her destination, but, after one night's rest at Downwich, to convey to Dover four cases of samples for an important business meeting. He was painfully anxious for the safety of these cases, and equally desirous that Miss Cherryfield should not observe his anxiety.

In the first exhilaration of departure, and the thrill of discovering that her goal was Mr. L'Estrange's home, she had amused herself by teasing the old man. What could possibly be the nature of the goods which inspired him with so much concern, she wondered; and commented on the strangeness of the time of year

chosen, the place selected for the transaction—swift to stab a discrepancy and cruel in mischievous laughter at Woolcot's flustered indignation. But by the time they had progressed half way her gay humour had departed. Not only was she heartily tired of the journey, cold and ill at ease, but something of her companion's apprehensiveness had laid hold of her. She began to fancy a sound of pursuing hoofs, hailed with comfort the lights of each townlet and village which they traversed, and shuddered when the great spaces, all the more terrible to her imagination because of their invisibility, once more closed around them, wind swept. To the patter of the sleet in the pause of the voices of the gale, she still would strain her ear for that muffled beat of pursuit behind her.

The arrival at Downwich was like stepping into a new world. Not only was the warmth, comfort, and safety that received her grateful alike to tired body and strained mind, but she thought it was like a kind of coming home. After those five weary years of repressed youth, after the gloom and the tedium of the City house, here was life again as she remembered it in her happy childhood. Grateful were the scent and colour of flowers, the blaze of hospitable fires in deep hearths, the cheer of innumerable wax candles, the pleasant spaces of inviting rooms, panelled white or darkly gleaming brown, gay with china and chintz. Best of all, the kindly embrace with which her hostess drew her into her arms, the welcome which made her feel comforted to the heart.

True, there was a sting of disappointment in the fact that Mrs. L'Estrange was alone to receive her. The lady, with the same bright,

claiming glance as her son's under a sweep of white hair, and something, too, in the sweet austerity of her delicate lips that brought the young man vividly before Pamela, said a few words of regret on the subject.

"My son Roland would have wished to have been here to-night, but he is absent on business. He trusts, however, to return at latest on Christmas Eve. I speak in his name, as well as in my own, when I bid you truly welcome to Downwich."

Both hands on the girl's shoulders, she held her at arm's length and gazed into her face with eyes full of such earnest scrutiny and meaning that Pamela felt herself crimson.

Then the old lady drew her close and kissed her again.

"My son was very anxious you should come to us," she went on, in her delicate, precise voice. "He sent a special messenger from town to inform me of your coming. He does not, as a rule, desire company at Christmastide, but he is very particular to explain that he regards your kind visit, my dear, as a special occasion."

With this enigmatic phrase, Mrs. L'Estrange, declaring that it was close on ten o'clock, conducted her young guest to the bedchamber allotted to her, and announced a cup of special strong soup, flavoured with marigold leaves.

"A family recipe, my dear, an invaluable specific against fatigue—a glass of elderberry wine. Nay, my dear, I insist! A glass of elderberry wine, warm. I promise you you will sleep."

She was a very stately lady, and continued to be stately still as she nodded and winked with both eyes in confirmatory fashion. But

Pamela had a restless eye and a hesitating manner.

“ What is it, my dear ? ”

“ Mr. Woolcot, ma'am.”

“ And what of him, Miss Cherryfield ? ”

“ Is he lodging here ? ”

She coloured violently as she blurted out the question ; then, mendaciously, for she did not like the task of deceiving her kind, dignified hostess :

“ I understand,” she went on, “ he is going away to-morrow. My uncle would like me—I think I ought to see if he is able for the journey. He seemed very tired.” Her tongue was more glib now. “ He's very old, you know, ma'am. My uncle meant to come himself.”

Mrs. L'Estrange stiffened very slightly up to the filmy wings of her wonderful lace cap.

“ Your escort, worthy man, is our guest to-night, child. He will be suitably lodged ; have no fear of that.”

“ And his luggage, ma'am ? ” Desperately the words broke from her. “ Uncle Wainfleet said the cases were of the utmost importance. Mr. Woolcot was so frightened for their safety during the journey.”

The stiffness vanished from Mrs. L'Estrange's air.

“ Tut, tut ! And he frightened you ? ” she said. “ 'Tis quite evident you're worn out. You're sadly nervous, my dear. Have never a fear ; your uncle's goods, and his clerk, and his niece, are all equally safe under this roof. Nay, now, not another word. Here comes Betsy with your tray. Not another word, my love ! ”

She bent over the girl, pressed a kiss upon her forehead, left a fragrance of rose-leaves and

lavender, and moved rustling—she wore a silver-grey tabinet, and mightily it became her—towards the door, leaving Miss Cherryfield uncertain whether to laugh or cry.

Pushed by the urgency of her purpose, the girl made one or two attempts to extract from Betsy some information as to the whereabouts of the clerk and his luggage; but, receiving nothing but “La, miss, I’m sure I couldn’t say!” accompanied by bursts of giggles, she desisted; and worn-out, indeed, as her hostess had said, she allowed herself to be assisted into bed.

Whether it were the effects of marigold in the pottage, or some insidious quality in the elderberry wine, it was a fact that Miss Cherryfield slept on to an unconscionable hour next day. She woke with a start and a throbbing heart, and pulled fiercely at the rosy, twisted bell-rope that hung between her bed-curtains.

Red-cheeked Betsy entered with a bounce and an explosion of amiable hilarity.

Dear, to be sure, miss *had* slept! Madam *was* pleased! Betsy had upped and wanted to bring miss a cup of tea this while back, it being gone eleven of the clock this hour back, and more. But madam had as good as bitten her head off.

Pamela broke in with a wail, and Betsy stared open-mouthed.

“Eleven of the clock! In God’s name——”

“Whatever is to do, miss?”

“Oh, heavens, who shall say now! Tell me, girl, quickly tell, Mr. Woolcot—the gentleman who came with me?”

“Gone this twenty minutes and more, miss.”

A triumphant announcement it was. It seemed as if in Betsy’s plane of life no news could be other than full of the most delightful

significance. She resumed her goggle-eyed stare as the young visiting lady wrung her hands, clasped them desperately over her brow, and fell back upon her pillows as one struck with despair. Garrulity being Betsy's chief occupation, she proceeded to amplify.

"The old gentleman was in a mighty hurry to be gone, miss. And a queer old gentleman he is, so as you don't mind my saying as much of one that belongs to you, so to speak. Them four cases of his, one would have thought they held di'monds and rubies! Nothing would serve him but to have them in his room all night, so Joe tells me. Joe is second in the stable, miss, and it comes his way to carry boxes for the quality——" Here Betsy paused. Mr. Woolcot obviously not coming under this category, she added with a jerk, "And visitors—and such!" She took a long breath and started off with fresh vigour. "Joe says to me, he'd rather shoe Besom—that's the kicking mare, miss—twice over, nor have to deal with such a crochety, queer old body again, miss. Oh, that be a queer old gentleman to be sure! Madam, she offer him a boy to drive, but 'No,' says he, 'not on no account!' He wish to drive himself, miss, all alone. It's my belief he thinks everybody's got an eye on them packs. Whatever he do have in them, to be sure? So they give him the black cob, which is quiet as ever is. The black cob 'll take the old gentleman to the Silver Tun blindfold!"

Pamela emerged again from among her pillows. Her face was pale, but the gaze of her brilliant eyes was steady as she fixed them on the girl, and there was a light in them as one who looks through danger on some goal of triumph.

"How far is it to the Silver Tun?" she asked.

"A good six miles, miss. 'Tis further nor midway to Tougham, and that's nigh Folkestone. Though, to be sure, what with the snow on the ground and the snow that's like to come down, and it all alone on the Downs—lost like! Dear me, miss, and me forgetting all about your breakfast."

"I will get up," said Pamela.

When Betsy returned, puffing and panting, with a laden tray, Miss Cherryfield was already before her mirror.

"Madam hopes you'll excuse her," cried the maid. "She's that busy to-day, being but two days before Christmas Eve, you see, miss. What with the doles—that's for the poor, miss—and having to have an eye to the stillroom and puddings and pies and that—and the Rev. Sweetapple—that's the clergyman, miss—up about the roasting of the ox, him that's roasted on the green—though dear to be sure, if the snow keeps on coming down——" Breath failed her; she gasped, "Madam begs you'll excuse her!"

Had it not been for her brother's dire need and the task she had set herself, nothing would have pleased Pamela better than to have begged to join in the glorious fuss of Christmas preparation. But how could she think of puddings and pies and that without sickness when every minute increased the distance between her and those cases of hidden treasure, wherein lay Harry's salvation?

She sat herself down, with a gloomy countenance, before the little table, spread with good things. Only that so much might depend on strength and quickness she could scarce have

brought herself to eat at all. But the next remark of indefatigably babbling Betsy brought back the savour to the crisp roll and the fragrance to the pot of chocolate.

"You'll maybe be wondering, miss, to see me that anxious-like, looking out at the snow, and, praise be, there *do* seem a sign of it clearing up. But you do look so kind, miss, and being, if you'll excuse my boldness, young-like, same as I, you'll not think the worse of me, like madam! Terrible strict, madam is—if as much as Joe passes the time o' day with me and me shaking a duster out of the window, it's character and all that's gone, if you'd believe madam. And Mrs. Mellinch, she's the worst—she's the housekeeper, miss, her with the purple ribbons and the sour face on her as you may have noticed last night. But it isn't as if Joe weren't honest stock same as meself—have you got enough butter, miss? There's preserve in the little covered dish—and meaning honest, as I was saying, though the poor lad—I ask you fair and square, miss, how can the lad speak of his intentions when there's never so much as a buss has passed between us. 'Twouldn't be human nature, like, but there! If I don't get a chance this Christmas I feel as if I'd go desperate like. Yes, miss, I'm watching the window. Poor Joe, having to go all the way across the Downs on master's horse, it being master's intention to pick up his horse at the Silver Tun, and Joe to bring back the cart the old man was off with this morning, master having gone straight by coach to Folkestone from London town."

Pamela looked up, a spoonful of the delectable strawberry-jam—deep crimson in filaments of amber syrup—poised in her hand.

"Tell me that again," she said very quietly.
"Your Joe?"

"La, miss, how you do go on!"

"At what time did you say your Joe starts for the inn?"

"After dinner, miss. Dinner bell will be a-going one o'clock as ever was. After dinner he do have to start; 'tis a stableman's life, miss, terrible hard! Jogging up his vittles cruel, say I. But Joe, he dotes on it! 'Tis as good as a gentleman, says he. In at all the sport."

"A delightful life, I am sure," said Pamela. Her voice quivered with repressed impatience. "Especially if you ride your master's horses. Will Captain—Mr. L'Estrange, I mean, be expected back to-night?"

"That's what no one can tell, miss. Why, his horse do be waiting for him that way, at the Tun, sometimes for days together. Dear, to be sure! The way master do roam, it's no wonder madam's that set on his marrying! All the young ladies we've had down here!"

Upon this Betsy stopped and surveyed Pamela, breathing stertorously, asly intelligence struggling into her glassy, grey eyes. For the life of her, Miss Cherryfield could not help the hot colour mounting, spreading all over her throat and rising to the roots of the loosened chestnut curls. So had she blushed under madam's investigating glance; and remembering this she blushed the more. Hurriedly she exclaimed, scarce knowing what she said:

"Joe and the cart, do you expect them back to-night?"

"Indeed, and pray heaven, miss!" The easily distracted Betsy again hurled her plump person towards the window. "Though to be sure, the

old gentleman driving that slow—and so be no dreadful snowstorm do be vouchsafed us in the Lord's mercy! I set my heart, miss, on Joe being back to-night. Joe, he—Joe, I—Joe and I, miss, we—I know as how you wouldn't betray a loving heart." Betsy hung a sentimental head and pleated her crisp apron between her large pink fingers.

"Me hâving got leave to go to the village to bring the Christmas comforts to my grand'dam to-morrow morning, miss, 'twould be a cruel body would think bad of his meeting me and helping to carry the basket, but——"

Pamela no longer heard nor saw. Some mental vision, at once alluring and alarming, absorbed all her energies. Mechanically she swallowed the spoonful of jam and instantly became aware that she could not eat another morsel; that her heart was beating violently; that she had an hysterical inclination to burst into tears. Her only alternative was a meaningless peal of laughter. Then her spirit rose. She felt as in the old half-forgotten hunting days when she had put her pony at a fence and her father, towering above her on the great chestnut, had been wont to call out to her: "Throw your heart over, Pam, throw your heart over first!" What a fence was this that now rose before her; what a leap in the dark! . . . Ay, but why should she fear? And had she not thrown her heart over first? The colour came back to her cheeks, the sound of weakness died on her lips. She looked at nonplussed Betsy gravely.

"I hope you and Joe will have your walk to-morrow. If ever I can help you to be happy some day—I will. Now I must quickly dress, and you must bring me to Madam L'Estrange."

VI

THE FOLKESTONE ROAD

MADAM L'ESTRANGE was as deep in a fluster as a lady of her dignity and deliberation could well be. A batch of cakes had caught in the oven, and indeed there was a by no means unappetising aroma of burnt spice in the great stone passage that led to the stillroom. Warring with the potpourri in the hall, it had guided Pamela to her hostess, as demonstratively as Betsy. A haunch of venison had arrived unexpectedly from a relative in Scotland. Madam was calling out instructions for the marinade to the immense rubicund cook who stood in the kitchen archway, a half-larded capon clasped against the crisp white bib of her apron. A little ruddy-cheeked, silver-haired gentleman in clerical attire stood behind the notable house-mistress; he gave an unapprehending glance at Pamela over his horn spectacles and resumed a contemplation of his note-book in which he seemed to be calculating abstrusely.

“ Lucky Wutherspoon. May I venture to remind you, dear madam, that Lucky Wutherspoon can no more chew the piece of beef you were kind enough——”

In a hesitating sing-song the parson thus interrupted the list of herbs for the marinade.

“ Gracious Heavens, man,” said madam, “ if

anyone wrote beef to Lucky Wutherspoon 'twas yourself. Who knows the teeth that can chew in the parish if I do not?—And is that you, my dear? I'm vastly pleased you've had so long a sleep.—The young lady I was speaking to you about, Mr. Sweetapple!—Nay, never mind, never mind, my love. He's lost in Christmas cheer; 'twill wait a better moment. Pray amuse yourself as you best can, Miss Cherryfield. I will meet you at two o'clock in the withdrawing-room, where, if you please, we will share a glass of wine and a slight refreshment.—Pigott!"

The portly butler appeared promptly from his own region upon this hail.

"I will accompany you this moment to the cellar, Pigott. I must have a couple of bottles of the 1811 claret for the venison. And I may as well give out the rest of the wine at the same time."

Pamela, however she might, at any ordinary time, have felt offended in her young dignity at being obviously a negligible quantity, was profoundly grateful for being thus set free at this particular juncture of affairs. She withdrew hastily into the hall, and there paused, reflecting. As she stood, a grandfather's clock behind her struck a solemn, solitary note; and instantly a bell clamoured in the courtyard without.

"The servants' dinner," thought the girl.

If she could ever hope for a favourable opportunity to raid the stables, in pursuance of the daring plan she had conceived at breakfast, this was her moment! She remembered, on her way down the staircase, peeping out upon the stable-yard through the long, mullioned window on the second landing. She now made for that

point of vantage with a flight like a bird. If the stablemen dined in the house she would see them crossing the courtyard.

She ensconced herself on the low window-sill and looked out eagerly through the strands of ivy that fluttered before the diamond panes. A stout, jovial man with a rolling gait—obviously the family coachman—crossed the snow-sprinkled cobble stones at an angle, followed by a couple of boys. Before disappearing from view, he halted and shouted over his shoulder :

“ Joe ! ”

Immediately the large stable door in front of her was opened, and a man with an impudent face and a crop of upstanding carrotty locks, popped his head out and shouted :

“ Coming ! ”

He disappeared within the recesses of the stable, leaving the door open, and Pamela's quick eye saw him busied in the semi-darkness within. He was biting a horse which stood, head forward, towards him in the stall.

“ 'Tis Mr. L'Estrange's horse, all ready for the start after dinner,” cried Pamela to herself. Joe was taking time by the forelock. He, too, was anxious not to be kept overnight, lest he should fail his Betsy. This was her time if ever. Madam in the cellar with the butler, every servant in the place that was not hard at work larding and basting, spicing and stewing, busy munching. In a moment Joe would have joined the rest and she be free of the stables. Fortune had indeed favoured her !

She locked herself into her room, drew the key of her trunk from her pocket and proceeded, her hands trembling with haste and eagerness, to draw forth Harry's old riding suit, boots, cloak,

hat, and box of pistols. It did not take long to cast off her own clothes and array herself in the masculine garments. Slight and youthful as she was, all the soft feminine curves of her figure disappeared—to her own thinking, quite satisfactorily—in the square, loose fit of the suit. She caught hold of her hanging curls, twisted them into a tight knot at the top of her head, and clapped on the high-crowned beaver, then cast the roquelaure about her. The collars, both of the outer and inner coats were cut high and came well up to meet the brim of her hat at the back. She stared at herself, started, and then laughed aloud. It was Pamela no longer, but Harry. Harry himself!

Then an exclamation escaped her. The throat, white as milk, and slender! She could not let it go bare like that. There was betrayal. What was it gentlemen wore? Psah! A stock! Fool that she had been, she had not thought to provide herself with neckgear. But when it comes to matters of toilet, women's wits are never slow to work, and Pamela's were of the readiest. Her muslin frock! Her only pretty party gown! She rushed to the cupboard, laid hold of the filmy skirt, and cut an immense strip from waist to hem. The effect of the high white folds, after she had dexterously manipulated them, was eminently satisfactory. She smiled at herself; struck an attitude; regretted—not for the first time in her life—that Providence had seen fit to make her of the softer sex; stuck a pistol into each pocket, made a couple of headlong steps towards the door, and paused.

The desperate disorder of her room could not escape the most casual glance. It would not do to have the hue and cry started a minute

before it was inevitable. She caught up the narrow skirts from the floor and thrust them into the gaping trunk ; then she proceeded to close the door upon the ruin of her embroidered muslin. A pang stabbed her as she did so. What was she not sacrificing to Harry ? The destruction of that delicate adornment—surely it included all her own budding hopes ! How would those eyes that had haunted her ever since she had first come under their piercing regard estimate her now ? The more dashing the gentlemen were, the more they liked their ladies to be quiet, gentle-mannered, and retiring. How often had her own dear mother preached this maxim to her, in rebuke for her hoyden ways ! What would madam think of the madcap ; of the desperate unsexed creature who was so ill repaying her hospitality ? And this brought her to another thought. She could not find it in her heart to cause that dear lady who had welcomed her with such motherly kindness, surrounded her with such solicitude, gazed upon her with such meaning favour, anxiety and distress. She sat down to her writing-table and wrote, painfully, controlling as best she might the tremor of her hand :

“ DEAR MADAM L'ESTRANGE,—Do not be anxious at my absence. I must go after Mr. Woolcot. It is a matter of urgent importance. I will return or give you tidings of myself as soon as I can.

“ PAMELA CHERRYFIELD.”

Thereto, in a scarcely legible scrawl, she added :

“ I hope you won't mind my having borrowed Mr. L'Estrange's horse.”

She folded the sheet, addressed it, placed it in a prominent position on her pin-cushion and ran, clattering, out of the room and down the stairs through the quiet house. Her only safety lay, she knew, in haste.

The yard was deserted. The beautiful brown horse that stood just inside the open door of the stable, his reins hitched across a post, regarded her with thoughtful eyes as she came up to him. He allowed her quietly to lead him to the horse-block, and mount, without protest. She settled herself astride as firmly as she might, and Mr. L'Estrange's steed picked his own way out of the yard towards the avenue.

Pamela and Harry had ridden from their earliest years. She had been proud of keeping up with her brother in all his games; and, many a time, they had caught their ponies and raced them, bare back, round the fields. Thus, riding had been a second nature to her: lucky for her that such early proficiency is not forgotten.

In the shade of a clump of trees she had to dismount and shorten the stirrup. The big horse indulged her manœuvres like a good-natured veteran amused by the gambols of a child. He permitted her to hoist herself on his back again, and carried her in an easy canter across the park, along a side-path which was evidently frequented by his usual rider as a short cut to the main road. She easily opened the gate; and, emerging on the highway, the horse trotted on towards the signpost which Pamela sighted a little way off on the right.

Having ascertained the direction, she started at a brisk pace upon the road to Hougham. Betsy's prayers were not like to be favourably answered, she thought, for the livid darkness of

a snow-cloud was gathering with portentous swiftness in front of her, and as she presently emerged out of the sheltered roadway into the great expanse of the downs, she could see the snow battalions advancing in solid phalanx like some terrible mystic army. The wind blew cruelly in immense swoops. The salt of the sea was in it ; and in its roar something of the hoarse voices of the breakers. The scene and the circumstances might well have daunted the bravest spirit, but Pamela encouraged her horse to a gallop in the teeth of the blast, and soon a kind of exhilaration began to pervade her whole being out of the very heart of the danger and conflict.

As the full squall caught horse and rider, however, she was fain to draw up in the shelter of a little copse and let its fury expend itself.

Gradually the stinging flakes began to clear of their first blinding intensity ; ever farther and wider the great, colourless wastes once more began to stretch themselves before her. Presently, somewhere in the distance, a faint shaft of sunshine pierced ; it lay like a yellow bar across the down, and in it glimmered a line of wet roof. Pamela broke a dry switch off the hazel bush nearest to her, and with it brushed the snow from her own shoulders and the flanks of her horse. Then she lifted the rein, and that most superlative of all steeds set off again in its long stride. She determined to make for the house that lay in the spreading sunbeam, and from thence to take fresh orientation. The road, partly owing to original malice, partly to the melting snowdrifts, had become very bad, and prudence urged proceeding at a much slower rate. The sunray, which had begun to grow

perceptibly, rose, then disappeared with its shimmer of gabled roof, as she jogged wearily through an immense hollow in the downs. And when she reached the top of the swell once more, not only was the short day closing about her, but the sudden darkness of another snow squall was spreading around.

It was a substantial inn, the roof of which had thus beckoned from far off. Lights were gleaming out from its lattice windows; and as it nestled in the fold of the hills, it looked to her at once the most lonely and the most companionable of places. She could now venture without losing her way to turn her horse off the road and canter towards it. She had a mischievous inclination to halt, call for the ostler, demand a cup of hot wine, or the "dog's nose" of her father's hunting days, and toss it down in true gallant fashion in the saddle; but she was restrained by a prudent apprehension of the effect of the unwonted potation upon her feminine head. As she brought her steed to a foot's pace upon the road again in front of the inn, a sight greeted her that lifted her heart better than any stimulant.

A small, neat luggage-cart, to which a powerful, stubby cob was harnessed, was drawn up before the open door. Ruddy light from within cast a deep amber glow upon the snow-heaps drifted one side of the porch, and upon the stalwart figure of the barman who was just turning back into the house, shaking the dregs from the pint pot he held in his hand. Pamela wheeled swiftly and withdrew out of the line of vision. Well did she know the outline of that huddled figure in the cart, those three capes and the tied-up head. She had had quite

ten minutes' amusement on her journey down from London to see Mr. Woolcot draw a kerchief over his cap and tie it under his chin, old-woman fashion. She knew that cough, too, querulously protesting against the weather and his own fate.

Fortune had again played into her hands more quickly and more completely than she had ventured to hope. To meet her victim alone on this great waste, in a snow-squall, darkness gathering about them! She could scarce even have imagined so excellent a concatenation of circumstances to facilitate her projected crime.

Pamela watched the slow jogging departure of the cart. After due time had elapsed, she started herself, in pursuit, and soon came in view of the traveller again, keeping at just sufficient distance not to lose light of his progress. This manœuvre she pursued for about half a mile, then drew rein on a little eminence. The downs swept away before her, singularly marked with varying whitenesses where the snow had been flung by the blast. In a rift of the lowering cloudbank she had a glimpse of the sun, a blood-red disc. To her left, some half mile away, a small fir-wood stood back out of the discoloured waste. The road curved round it, disappearing into it, and reappearing, distinct to her vision by reason of an overhanging continuous ridge of furze-bush on the lee side of the wind, which marked it with a sinuous line drawn as if by a paint-brush dipped in Indian ink.

A second time she now deserted the highway, and with increasing speed set out across the downs. Her intention was to cut off that loop of the road, skirt the fir-wood, and emerge in front of the cart. The snow-storm was already flying up the vale towards them. She wished to make

her dash in the very thick of it, from the shelter afforded by the wood.

Her heart beat quickly as she took her position at last, fairly well protected from blast and snow flurry by the trunks of a couple of giant fir-trees. She drew one pistol from her pocket and balanced it in readiness, settled herself more firmly in her saddle, and pulled her hat-brim down over her eyes. She hesitated upon the thought of tying a handkerchief across her face for disguise, but cast it from her. What did she care, after all, if Woolcot were to recognise her? She had taken no pains for concealment all along; and the best justification of her conscience was her firm resolve, once the deed accomplished, to blazon the truth to her uncle. How little, indeed, would she care to be disgraced in his eyes and disinherited by him! Was she not casting away hopes and prospects far more intimately dear—as dear as they had been sudden?

Thus she sat, straining every nerve to listen. The whole world seemed full of noise and fury. But they were not human sounds that beat about her. It was the clamour of the wind, bringing the great sea voices with it. It came tearing, unimpeded, over the empty spaces, to break itself in hissings and pipings against the little wood, and fly on again shouting. She felt an extraordinary solitude in the midst of this all-enveloping rumour. The livid gloom which the squall brought hung paralysingly upon her spirits. Her horse shuddered under her.

She had meant not to emerge from her concealment until the cart was actually within sight; but a sudden terror of the possibilities, of the terror lurking in her own heart, of the danger of the

cold that was creeping to the vital seat of energy, warned her that she must act, and that promptly, or she might never act at all. She had already urged her horse cautiously out of the wood, when a cry fell upon her ear—a cry of pain and anger.

Involuntarily she drew rein to listen. Again it came—a scream :

“ Help ! Help ! ”

“ Quick, quick ! ” she cried aloud, and plunged forward, she herself and her brave steed animated, it seemed, by the same spirit. The storm was at their back, it seemed to blow them on. The flurry went with them.

Just those few moments of pace, of energy, and self-forgetfulness, sufficed to restore her brave warmth of courage. She had to pull up swiftly, drawing the horse back on its haunches, or they would have leaped upon the cart. The cob stood, his head hanging, as if cowed by the storm. But behind him there seemed to be a struggle. She heard the sound of a blow—a dull thud which sickened her. Woolcot ! Woolcot, poor old man—horrible it was to her to see it—fell in a heap upon his seat, and a ruffian leaped up upon the wheel of the cart. Pamela lifted her hand and fired straight at him in that one moment in which he stood poised, a hideous masked figure of evil, all in the white dance of the snow. He went down, with a suddenness as complete, and almost as dreadful to her, as the old clerk's collapse.

The cob swerved at the sound of the shot, and she had to take her own horse round in a wide circle before she could bring him back to the cart again. Of all that day's tremendous experience, here was the most awful moment

to her ! It had been bad enough to be alone in the fierce play of the elements a little while ago, but how infinitely more appalling, was it not, to be alone with those two motionless beings, both perhaps dead, one by her own hand !

Old Woolcot moved and groaned in the cart. Quickly she slid from her horse, slipped the reins over the bough of a tree, flung the smoking pistol on the ground, and drew the undischarged one from her pocket, in case that first aim of hers should not have been so deadly true after all. And the very next moment she congratulated herself that she had done so, for the man, whom she trembled to have killed, got up on one knee, and then to his feet. She raised her weapon, then dropped it quickly, for he was staggering, and she saw that his right arm hung nervelessly beside him. The club with which he had struck old Woolcot lay between them.

" You know that I can shoot ! " she cried fiercely.

She wished passionately that he would run away and leave her alone to look after Woolcot. With an inarticulate sound in his throat, the man lifted his left hand and tore off his hat ; the piece of crape which masked him fell at the same time. She stared at the livid face with terror.

" Zachary ! "

" Yes, Miss Pamela, it's e'en mesel'. It's Zachary. Hech, I thocht ye were Mister Harry till ye spoke."

" Oh, Zachary, Zachary ! "

She was indeed nothing now but a frightened girl, overwhelmed with the fear, misery, and remorse of the situation.

" Oh, Zachary, Zachary, how could you ?

Oh, poor old man, how he groans ! Oh, perhaps he's dying ! ”

Zachary's face worked. He looked as if he were going to break horribly into tears ; but it was a ghastly smile he gave.

“ He's no' dying,” he said, after a pause, between a couple of hard-wrung breaths. Before she could speak the question palpitating to her lips, with the odd prescience of the lover, he went on roughly :

“ Nor I neither. But I reckon my arm's broken.”

Again he fetched a breath from the depths of his being.

“ Good-bye, Miss Pamela,” he said, then wheeled and took three or four reeling steps away from her. He stopped and looked back. “ Make sure of the gold, Miss Pam. Now's your time ! ”

He then broke into a run, and disappeared into the wood between the black trunks of the trees.

Pamela clambered into the cart over the four clamped cases into the front seat and, sitting, strove to raise Woolcot. She thought he looked dreadful as she succeeded at last in getting his head back against her knee. Suddenly she remembered the little flask of cordial out of which he had more than once sought solace in the coach the previous day. Plunging her hand into his breast pocket, she drew it forth triumphantly.

The contents were evidently very strong, for, after a few drops had penetrated through his closed lips, Mr. Woolcot started, choked, and sniffed ; then, to Pamela's delight, he put out a trembling, thick-gloved hand, guided the bottle

himself in the proper direction, and took a perceptible gulp. The girl was so relieved to find him in such good case after all that the spirit of mischief seized her. She caught the flask out of his hand and sniffed at it.

"Oh, Woolcot, Woolcot! Cherry brandy, as I'm a living sinner!"

Laughing, she wiped it carefully, took a considerable mouthful herself, and coughed, startled. It seemed to run like fire through her veins.

Woolcot looked up at his rescuer. Horror and amazement were gathering in his blinking eyes.

"Good heavens, Master Harry!"

He drew himself away and, groaning afresh with the effort, hoisted himself up on the seat beside her. His gaze of horror never left her face, but while she hesitated, wondering if it might not further her plan to keep up the delusion, shattered the scheme in a single reproachful phrase.

"Oh, and to think you should come to robbing your benefactor! Oh, Master Harry!"

"Harry? I'm not Harry! You're an old fool, Woolcot! Robbing, why——" She pushed her hat back from her forehead as she spoke. "Look at me. That's not Harry, is it? Yes, it is Miss Pamela. You have a mean mind. I always knew it—I wish Za——" She caught herself up in time. No, it was the last of her purposes to betray that desperate, misguided villain of love! "I wish the footpad, whoever he was, who cracked you on the head had cracked you a little harder. Yes, I do. Where would you be if it wasn't for me? He was standing on the wheel with his club up to whack you again when I shot him. I—I—Pamela! Look out

there, if you don't believe me. That's his club and that's his blood—where I shot him. That's my pistol, too. Poor Harry, cast off and disgraced, it's not he who thought of robbing you. If there's any robbing to be done I'm going to do it.—Now look there, Woolcot, it's no use mouthing and muttering. You haven't got any firearms, I believe. And if you had you couldn't use them on me. But I've got another pistol—somewhere. Now listen. I've found out all about uncle and the gold smuggling and everything. I was behind the door that night. Do you remember the creak? Well, it wasn't the wind. I've come after you just for that gold. Now you're going to give me your keys. Oh, yes, you are! Where's my pistol?—Ah, thank you. You'd better help me, I think. What's that you say? Ruin—ruin—your trust? You shan't be ruined. I'm not a bad fellow, though I am a footpad, for this once. I'll tell you what I'll do. I only want one belt. I'll take the rest to the cave myself. I'll do that—not for you, but for uncle. Uncle's a game old boy for all his texts, and I'm—I'm fond of him.”

The old clerk put his hand to his head, moaned two or three times, held a rapid and noiseless colloquy with himself with a good deal of head-shaking and contortions, his hypnotised gaze remaining attached to Pamela's countenance. At last, as with an impatient gesture she turned to the well of the cart and began to try the lock which faced her, he said :

“ I've no strength to resist you. You must do as you please, Miss Cherryfield. You're a bold, bad young lady. And you must answer for it to the master.”

“ Well, you're a pretty ungrateful old guinea-

pig ! Why, but for me you would have lost, not one belt, but all the ten, remember," replied Pamela.

Her spirits had risen to exhilaration point. Perhaps even that mouthful of cherry brandy had put her a little off her balance. She felt primed for any emergency ; not only ready, but longing.

The frenzy of the storm was already past. It had gone by like a raid of Arabs, carried on by its own impetus. Already the oppressive, livid darkness was past, and the sky, that had held so much menace, was rifted with faint orange and green : the huge rim of the crimson sun was cut in two by the horizon. Now that she had a moment's breathing space, the true sporting instinct bade her remember her horse. She picked up the rug that had been thrown over Woolcot's cases, and covered the good steed carefully—an oft-impressed lesson of the old hunting days.

Zachary's club had evidently done small damage. The old clerk's swoon had been caused more by fright and shock than by the strength of the blow, and probably the fashion in which he had tied his thick cap about his head had protected him. But he was still shaken and terrified, and either physically incapable of helping her or obstinately averse to doing so. He sat huddled, grunting and groaning, while she opened and rifled the trunks of their precious contents, a piece of work which it took no small strength and enterprise to accomplish. Nine of the laden belts she secured to her saddle. Carrying the tenth in both hands, she stood before the cart and addressed Woolcot.

" Do you see what I am doing ? I am putting

this round my waist, under my coat, because I'm going to keep it. I shall account to my uncle for the money. It's my share of this bit of smuggling. It's only fair I should have a share in it since I'm going to do the job for him. Tell me, how do I get to Hougham Cave ? ”

As he stared at her dumbly, his mouth working, she put her hand in her pocket and let him have a glimpse of the pistol. It was enough. The menace of that rim of steel would have cowed him to any surrender. He told her without protest.

About a couple of miles farther on, where the cliffs overhung the sea, she would find to her right a deserted barn. There all was arranged for putting up cart and horse and unpacking. And in the dark of the nightfall the belts could be carried in safety down to the cave by the shore. There was a path from the barn through the cliffs. She would find rough steps leading down to the mouth of the cave, between two gorse-bushes to the left. The agent would be in the cave an hour after sunset, and the boat waiting outside. She was to answer to no one who did not give the password : “ *A just weight and balance are the Lord's.* ” And the countersign was : “ *How much better is it to get Wisdom than Gold !* ”

Pamela repeated the words with a laugh. That was Uncle Wainfleet all over, to bring his texts even into such a queer business !

She turned the cob round, not without some pulling and straining, glad of the warmth which the effort restored to her limbs. The unaccustomed weight of the belt round her waist added to the difficulty, but did not depress her : the gold had indeed lifted a burden off her heart.

She handed the reins to Woolcot ; told him cheerily it was not far to the inn, where he could go to bed and sleep for a week if he liked.

“ You can have some more dog’s nose ! ” she called after him mockingly, as the cob, content to be facing home, broke into a steady trot.

Then she uncovered her horse, rolled the rug into a bundle, and laid it in front of her saddle over the belts, mounted and started. They pressed on, horse and rider, as gallantly as they might. She was anxious to reach the barn before that swift-fading light should have deserted the sky and the moonless night should have fallen about them. It was all very well for that hardened old smuggler to talk so glibly of paths and cliffs and caves ! She would have to make two, if not three, journeys with her load. She preferred not to break her neck in the dark. Once in the cave she could wait in safety.

VII

PASSWORDS

It was quite black in the cave. Perhaps the strangest part of all that strange day's adventure, perhaps the hardest test of her endurance, belonged to those weary minutes of suspense and inaction which she was doomed to spend there waiting. The raucous, intermingled turmoil of the sea reverberated all about her in never-ceasing clamour, marked by the monotonous roar and dash of the rollers that broke some hundred yards away upon the sand. There was little wind now, but the ocean unrest would scarce be allayed all the night through.

The patch of sky framed by the rugged entrance to her hiding-place grew indistinct, and finally disappeared. But presently, and her heart leaped to the comfort of it, she saw a star tremble dimly forth. She had had a moment's panic of the immense blackness shutting in upon her altogether; of the horror of being boxed about with the unpierceable dark. Now it was no prison to her, but an open place. Yonder, in that rift where the star hung, through which the great sea murmur came, someone would soon come in upon her. Someone! . . . The guinea smuggler, "Captain Smith"—Roland L'Estrange! He would come in; and in the dark

they would meet again. What a singular, wonderful meeting it might be ! What would he think to find her thus ? Would she disclose herself ? It would be impossible that he should believe her to be Woolcot. She could pretend to be Harry. But he might bring a lantern ; no doubt he would. He might look at her, and what use would pretence be before one single glance of those eyes ?

As she sat, huddled together on a stone, she shivered, and then grew scarlet in the night. A cordial more potent than Woolcot's cherry brandy seemed to be running through her veins ; fire and sweetness and terror and exhilaration all combined ; such a wine as only youth can drink of—and that perhaps but once.

A curious grating sound made her leap to her feet. She could distinguish subdued voices between the mighty shout of one dashing wave and the next. That was the boat. How silently it had drawn near ! Her heart throbbed wildly in her ears. Footsteps crunched in towards her, and halted. She could feel rather than see the figure which stood between her and the outer night.

He spoke. The deep, low lones stirred her indescribably, as if some echo within her woke and answered :

" A just weight and balance are the Lord's."

The text sounded like music in her ear. She answered under her voice :

" How much better is it to get Love than Gold!" Then, with a cry, corrected herself :
" I mean Wisdom !"

Confusion overwhelmed her. The word she had misplaced seemed to be written before her in letters of flame, throbbing with a dreadful

significance. For a moment the cave became a shrine of tense silence. Then the man said :

“ Who speaks ? ”

His accents were curiously quiet, but there was a subtle alteration in them. Emotion seemed to come out from him and catch her. It was like a hand at her throat. She could not utter. A light flashed suddenly. He had drawn a dark lantern, and was holding it close to her face. She had been prepared for that, and braced herself. Again there was silence while they looked at each other, but she heard him breathe as if he were running. Thoughts rose faintly, to be whirled away before her brain could so much as grasp them, like straws in a whirlpool.

All at once her efforts seemed to die in her. She only felt that he was looking at her and she on him. It was as she had told herself : before that gaze of his no attempt at disguise or subterfuge could avail. He knew her. He was reading into her soul. If she had wanted to raise a barrier she could not have done it. She did not even know if she wanted it. He shifted the ray and the spell was broken. Then she found words.

“ Yes, it's I, Pamela Cherryfield. I've got the gold here for you. Uncle's ill, you know, and Woolcot was stopped by a footpad. I've brought them—the belts. They're here on the ground.”

The lantern beam pointed to the pile at his feet.

“ There are nine,” he said. “ There should be ten.”

Now that she could no longer see him, the singular power of his gaze upon her was relaxed. Her mind began to work, her spirit to reassert

itself. His absence of comment on her escapade galled her. His business question started resentment.

"I've got the tenth belt. I'm going to keep it. That's what I followed Woolcot for. That's why I dressed up like this. I'll answer for it to my uncle. That's my affair. Yours is to take charge of what I've brought you."

The light flashed upon her face again, and, wincing away from it, she fell silent. Her cheeks burned, and she thought, womanlike, that she must be scarlet and he would think her a fright. She did not know what his glance was saying to her, what thought it was that lay behind the strange fire of his gaze; but it was not distaste. Her own eyes were beaten down before his. She stammered and trembled. Then he said :

"Are you sure it is enough ? "

"What ? "

She could not imagine what he meant.

"The belt you took ? "

The wit to answer failed her, and he went on. He was smiling now, as she faintly saw. The light was switched away from her face. He continued in quiet, everyday tones :

"Better make it do. I'll see that you get more later if you want it."

"Oh, I don't know what you think of me ! " The words came at last with a rush. "It wasn't I stopped old Woolcot. It was—it was not my fault ! But Woolcot couldn't have driven on here. He was too frightened. He'd had a knock on the head. I wouldn't have hurt him. I—I had to have the money." A sob began to rise in her throat. She fell back on her first cry : "I don't know what you think of me ! "

He had been stooping over the belts, but straightened himself now and took her hand.

"I think of you just one thing. I thought it the first moment I saw you. I cannot tell you what it is now ; I will tell you——" He stopped. She felt as if in the barely lighted dimness his look completely laid hold of her. Then he dropped her hand. "I will tell you another time." And then in that everyday voice which had offended her : "And now, Miss Cherryfield, my business takes me from you. Stand back a little into the shadow."

He whistled low. A few moments later two men came into the cave. She had a vague impression that they were dressed like fishermen. He gave a couple of orders. They seized the belts and departed. When the sound of their cautious steps had died away, he came back to her. "How will you get back ? Did you come in the cart ?" There was the stress of both haste and anxiety in the quick question he now put to her.

"No." She hesitated. "Woolcot had to keep that. I—I——" Whatever happened, she would be brave with him. "I took your horse—your brown horse. It was ready saddled. The men were at dinner. I left him safe in the barn at the top of the cliff, covered up."

He drew a quick breath as of relief.

"He'll take you back right enough. Let him go his own way. He's surer than many a comrade. Go back straight home, back to Downwich. Stay, I'll give you a line to my mother."

He drew a notebook from his pocket and wrote hastily, tore out the leaf, folded it, and handed it to her.

“ I leave you the lantern. Good-bye. Keep brave. You’re in no danger. Don’t leave the cave for a few minutes, and hold the light low.”

He did not touch her hand again. He went out with firm strides, but in a second wheeled round. He stood in the entrance of the cave, the star now lightly scintillating over his head.

“ *How much better is it to get Love than Gold!* That was a good text of yours ! ” A tender laughter ran through his tone. “ I shall be back at Downwich on Christmas Eve, God willing ! ”

Then he was gone. Her knees gave way beneath her as she sat down on the stone, the paper he had given her clasped in her hand. She heard the grating of the keel, strange, confused, muffled noises ; but no sound of voices, and no beat of oars ; then nothing but the waves’ turmoil. Secretly as the gold-smugglers had come, they were gone : out into the great, tossing waste, into their peril and adventure.

The brown horse brought his burden into the courtyard of Downwich Grange (the coachman afterwards averred) as wise as any Christian. There were plenty of people on the look-out, for great had been the agitation and anxiety in the household all day ; and, though news had been received of the arrival of Mr. Woolcot at the Silver Tun, he had declared he knew nothing of the young lady’s whereabouts.

Pamela sat swaying on her saddle, staring and smiling vaguely at the lights and the faces, without attempting to dismount. When they had lifted her off she swooned away.

Madam L’Estrange would allow no one to attend to her but herself. As she loosened the manly clothes, she found and removed the heavy

belt of gold, which she immediately hid away in the trunk. When she came back to the bed, the girl had stirred slightly, lifting one hand to her breast. From beneath it, over the feebly beating heart, the old lady took a folded paper which bore inscribed in her son's handwriting :
" For my mother."

She carried it over to the light and unfolded it. Within, the brief message ran :

" Mother, take care of Pamela for me."

VIII

DOWNWICH GRANGE

It was ten o'clock on Christmas Eve. Pamela lay on the sofa, alone in the pretty, white-panelled, chintz-bright room which was called madam's parlour. She knew that, faithful to his promise, Roland L'Estrange had arrived at Downwich about an hour before, and that he was now having supper with his mother in the dining-room.—She had been served apart.

Madam had nursed her these two days with a severe yet tender authority. She had not asked a single question ; she had refused explanation ; she had even forbidden conversation. But there was something in the expression of the kindly, chiselled face, as delicately tinted in beautiful old age as one of those frail roses that bloom, in sheltered corners of old walls, when the summer is over ; something of gentle, restrained emotion, that made the girl take heart of grace. And, twice to-day, she had spoken words which to the eager ears were rich with promise. The first was in answer to Pamela's question, hazarded at last, that morning :

“ Your son gave me a message for you, ma'am. I trust I did not drop the paper.”

“ No, my dear, you did not drop it. You had it quite safe. I took it and read it.”

There was a long pause.

" May I—may I know what was in it, Madam L'Estrange ? "

" You didn't read it, then ? "

" Oh, ma'am ! "

" Well, my dear, since your honour was nice enough to prevent you from looking at the contents of that open scrap of paper, I think we had better leave it at that a little longer."

Perhaps it was the disappointment in the girl's face that made the old lady add, after a pause :

" No doubt, my son Roland will tell you anything you wish to know before very long."

Upon that ambiguous remark, and the faint twinkle in the eyes that accompanied it, Pamela had striven to rest her unquiet thought in all the waking moments of that second long, drowsy day.

It was after bringing her a little dish of tea ; just at the hour when the gay wood fire in her room began to hold its pleasant sway over the encroaching shadows, that Madam L'Estrange made her second encouraging speech :

" I hope, Miss Cherryfield, that you may feel sufficiently reposed to come down for a short while this evening—just into my parlour. I shall insist on your not rising from the sofa. It being, I understand, my son's intention to be back with us some time this afternoon, he would, I know, be disappointed not to be able to see you to-night."

Pamela's heart had begun to beat so fast that she could scarcely reply ; but, overlooking her agitation with a very dignified courtesy, madam had gone on :

" That is well, then. I have had your muslin

dress mended, my dear. Mrs. Mallinch is a very neat sewer, and I do not think the patch at all observable."

It was in the little, best white gown that Pamela was now attired accordingly; and she lay, as ordered, on the narrow sofa that had gilt lions' heads on each curved arm. She lay because she dared not disobey; but it was very irksome to her to keep those slender, sandalled feet of hers extended quietly before her, and not let them carry her restlessly about the room.

The door opened, and Roland L'Estrange came in alone. She sat bolt upright, and turned her head to look at him. She could not utter a word. He stood still, gazing at her as if no fairer sight had ever greeted a man's eyes. Then he advanced, took her hand in silence. Still holding it he sat down on the spindle-legged chair beside her.

After a while, seized with an overwhelming self-consciousness, she drew her fingers away. He said quickly:

"Things cannot be between you and me as with ordinary people. Conventions, fine manners, preliminaries! Do you want all that of me now? No—you cannot. Pamela, from that first instant I saw you, I knew——" She questioned him with a swift, half-frightened, half-audacious glance. "I knew," he said, "that I had found my mate."

"Oh!"

"Pamela,"—he was kneeling beside her now—is it not true?"

And with that his arm went about her.

It was true that from the first instant she had felt that with one look he had captured her.

And it was true that she was captive—a willing, ecstatic captive!

Life opened before her, new and wonderful, filled with a rosy radiance. But the Diana spirit that dwells in every pure maiden soul sprang, armed, resentful of the sudden attack. One breathing space she let him hold her to his breast and heard the great beating of his heart beneath her ear, and yielded herself to the tide of joy. But the revulsion was swift. She tore herself from his grasp, pushed him from her; rose trembling and panting.

“No, no; I can’t! I—I don’t know you. You know nothing of me except—except the dreadful thing I’ve done!”

He had sprung to his feet. He was all at once as quiet again as she was agitated. In the pause that came between them his spirit went forth and laid hold of her as in those dark minutes of the cave. Resistance was easier when his eyes were not upon her. She could fling from her the grip of his strong arms; she could not release her soul from the soul that claimed her.

“Pamela, my wild bird! . . .”

She swayed towards him, with downcast lids.

EPILOGUE

“ MY OWN DEAR, DEAR HARRY,—Oh, my own Harry, everything is all right ! The same sure messenger that brings you this will have lodged at the Bank six hundred pounds ! Six hundred pounds—six hundred pounds ! So the dreadful debt can be paid after all, and your poor Pam has not failed of her promise. Did you not do well to trust me ? Did I not say I would save you ? And oh, Harry, there is better news still ! You are to have a commission in the Army, and a proper allowance, and I know—oh, I’ve promised for you—you will be good and steady and never gamble and bet and back bills again !

“ You’ll wonder how all this has come about. It seems like a fairy tale. And I can’t even begin to tell you. It’s such a long, odd, mad story, and I’ve done such dreadful things, and it’s ended right, I don’t know how ! Oh, yes, I do ! It’s because he—he is still a stranger to you—is the best, dearest, kindest, most wonderful being in the whole world. And it’s Mr. Roland L’Estrange, and oh, Harry, I’m the luckiest girl that ever was born, because—perhaps you’ve guessed—I’m going to marry him !

“ I’ve told him all about you, brother dear, and how you can’t settle to the horrid work of copying and scrawling, and how you can’t bear the stuffy, dark rooms and the stupid lawyers

after our open-air life, and the hunting and the comrades and the horses and the dogs and the guns, and all that you were brought up to, all that you were accustomed to in the good old days. I've told him how uncle thwarted you, and how he wants to make a dull, learned man of you. And I've told him, too, that it's only because you're unhappy that you've taken up with those wild young gentlemen and the cards and the dice. He says he believes in everybody having his chance, and that if you're in the profession you like, it's ten times more easy to keep straight. And he's going to make uncle understand all this ; and he's not a bit afraid of uncle. And it seems he knows uncle will be so prodigiously pleased about us—Roland and me—that he won't mind what I've done.

“ And oh, Harry, the gentleman who brings you this letter, Roland says you're to trust him absolutely, and put everything in his hands, and let him settle the bill for you, for he is Mr. L'Estrange's own lawyer. His name is Smith, too. Oh, I forgot, I'll tell you all when you come. And this is almost the best of everything, you're to come down here as soon as your business is settled, and spend the New Year at Downwich, and learn to know my Roland, and see for yourself how happy I am. And Roland is writing too.

“ It's quite late at night, but I couldn't write before, because Roland wouldn't let me out of his sight. And as it was, we kept saying good-night to each other, just like Juliet, for nearly an hour on the stairs, till Madam L'Estrange came out of her room, and laughed and scolded us. She didn't really mind, because Boxing Day is just the last of Christmas. She just

said : ' Think of all the happy Christmases you'll have together, children.' And I said : ' Oh, but we'll never have this one darling Christmas again.'

" You've no idea how silly Roland was when I said that. I never could have believed " (here Miss Cherryfield had elaborately crossed out a phrase). " It is true, I've had the most glorious Christmas, so blessed, too, the little church in the snow and my heart so full of thankfulness and love.—Your ever devoted sister,
" PAMELA CHERRYFIELD."

" P.S.—Madam L'Estrange, my new mother, is kind and grand and beautiful, and I love her. She is very glad that I am going to marry her son, because, as she said to me : ' He loves danger, my dear, for the mere sake of danger, and a wife will teach him that his life is precious.' We've promised her, both of us, we'll never, never do any more gold running. I'm always forgetting—you'll have to wait to know what I mean till you come here.

" Dear brother, I've opened this letter again. I'm afraid happiness makes one rather selfish. It quite escaped my memory to tell you I had a missive from poor Zachary—Zachary Muckleblane. He came down somewhere near here to spend his Christmas holiday. Wasn't it funny of him ? He always was like nobody else. And he got hurt somehow ; I think it's his arm that's broken. Somebody else wrote his letter for him—a sailor. He doesn't want his mother to be frightened, so he says please will you tell her he's doing all right, and she's not to be anxious. But he's never, never going back to be uncle's clerk any more. He's going to be a sailor, he

says, and she's not to expect to see him till he can bring her some money.

"Will you go yourself, dear Harry, and tell her this? She was always so fond of you. And Roland says, as uncle is so bad with the gout, he need never know you're there. And after your visit here, Roland says he will himself bring you to uncle and make everything quite straight, just as I've promised you. I was sorry for poor Zachary, but Roland thinks it will do him good to be a sailor, and that it will be twice the life for him.

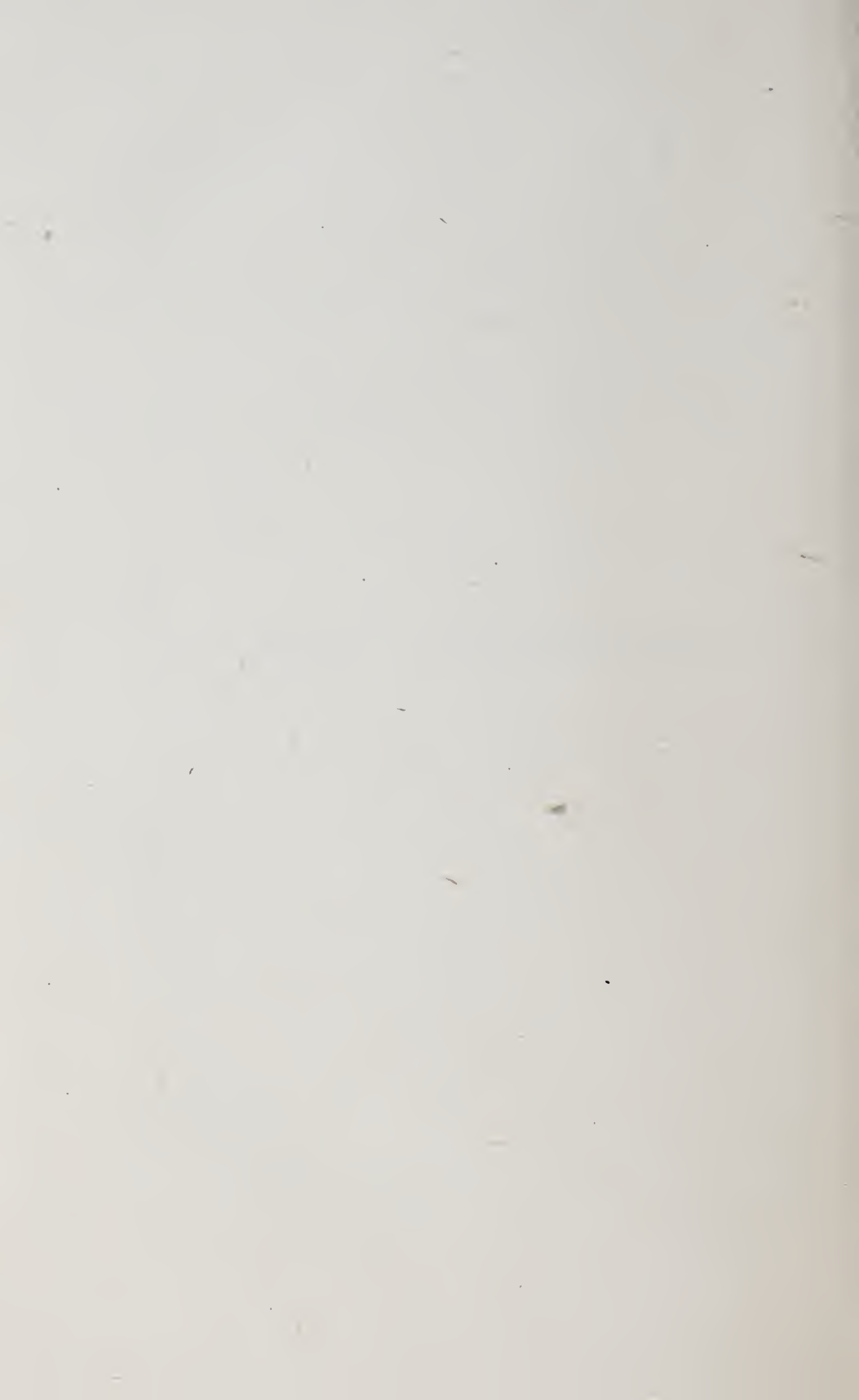
"And oh, Harry, I'm too sleepy for words, but I must just tell you. I've had such games with old Woolcot, you can't think! He's at a little inn some miles from here, with the most dreadful cold in his head anybody ever had. You'll think everybody is down here. I *have* such things to tell you.

"Roland went to see him yesterday. He doesn't want him to go back to uncle till our messenger has gone; so he assured him he'd certainly die if he travelled when he's sneezing so dreadfully. Roland was so funny. He told me Mr. Woolcot was sitting before a roaring fire, with his head tied up, and the landlady's thickest shawl round his shoulders, and his feet in mustard-and-water. Roland said he was drinking gruel, but I say I know it was dog's nose.

"One last P.S., Harry dear. There's a text that says, I believe, '*How much better it is to get Wisdom than Gold.*' Madam L'Estrange found it for me. But I got it all wrong, and I said: '*How much better it is to get Love than Gold.*' And— isn't it wicked?—Roland declares he likes my version much better than the original!"

VI

THE ARRESTING POINT



I

MR. FARRANT, FROM ST. GERMAINS

It had been a four days' voyage, from Durkirk's mile-long jetty to the tricky entrance of Leith harbour; this in a Dutch brig laden with butts of the mighty vintage of Burgundy—which, artistically blended to the subtler wine of Gascony, goes to make the delectable tippie known as Scottish Claret. The brig was dumpy and given to more pitching than in reason; it was poorly found, and there was no other person of quality on board. Altogether, it had proved a journey detestable beyond the expression of words.

As young Mr. Farrant (lately of the Chevalier de St. George's English household at St. Germain) at last set foot on the North Pier, his first thought was a fierce resolve that nothing on earth would induce him voluntarily to renew that experience.—Yes, split him! his return journey (when the time came for it) would of a certainty take place along the Queen's highway, as far south as it would lead him.

The resolve taken, Edward Farrant, who was of mercurial temperament, began to look once more at life from the pleasant side. Buoyancy of health, vital sap of youth—eight and twenty was his light burden of years—consciousness

of good looks and self-reliant strength ; added to these a mellow autumnal afternoon, and the prospect of a welcome in yonder unknown town of which the jagged outline stood, genially smoke-crowned, against a primrose sky, all these things were his. Little wonder, therefore, that his spirits should rise with a lift to meet his new adventures.

So he gaily picked his way between the casks, the bales, the baskets of fish and all the impedimenta of a crowded harbour-side. Point-device in garments which, however sober of colour, proclaimed, from the cream-tinted Steinkerker at the neck to the blue-steel buckle at the knee, the special skill and nice attention to detail of a French tailor ; with cloak thrown over left shoulder as gallantly as any cairngorm-buckled plaid ; with sword hanging free and soldier-like at the proper angle between the coat-skirts ; with grey beaver of latest courtly cock on his own brown hair (for your full wig does not befit travelling), Edward Farrant presented an appearance which could not but fill the eye of connoisseurs.

Indeed, the best part of this wearisome day on board, from the passing of Holy Island to the sighting of Auld Reekie, had been spent in prinking and pruning, as far as the scant convenience of a brig's cabin would allow ; for was it not, above all things, desirable that the first meeting of Mr. Farrant with his uncle should evoke approval ? And Sir William Hope, of Balcomie, was said to be the keenest judge of gentlemanlike bearing and accomplishments.

Having arranged for the conveyance of his travelling valise to the Castle—at the quarters of the Depute-Governour—the new-comer to

Scotland strode on untrammelled ; burdened with nought more cumbersome than a parcel of papers—documents too precious to be trusted to any keeping but his own secure pocket.

In ten minutes he had left behind the drab harbour town and stepped in open country, green and brown, along the unmistakable high-road that connects it with the city. Half an hour later, his view was once more encompassed by greyness—grey pavement, grey walls of granite topped with grey volutes of smoke—Edinburgh itself at last ! At a lustier pace he ascended Leith wynd, and turned under the Nether Bow, light-hearted and curious ; filled with expectations.

He was breaking new ground in life. Somewhere, in this close-pressed cluster of ancient houses that now rose about him so strangely tall and shadowy, mounting towards the red glow of sunset ; somewhere close at hand, perhaps, snuggled a certain lawyer's den. And there an unexpected inheritance awaited him. But just now, the most joyful anticipation was that of a meal and a bottle in the decency of an airy room (aye, and a steady floor) ; of genial intercourse with a kinsman of parts ; of sleep within the cleanliness of sheets and in the soothing of silence—of a return, in short, to the refinements of existence.

He climbed the steeper slopes of Castle Hill ; there fronted the sentry, all brick-red and buff, at the outer postern of the fortress ; held a short parley with a grizzled veteran who hobbled out of the guard-room to reconnoitre ; and was finally conducted by this worthy through the intricacies of sally-ports and platforms to the Governor's quarters.

“ Ye’ll be the braw callant from foreign pairts that Sir William has been just wearying for this mony a day,” observed the old soldier benevolently as they halted outside the tall iron-studded door.

“ I believe so, my man,” responded the youth.

“ Here’s ane for your Honour ! ” called the guide in his high-pitched voice, and threw open the great panels.

Night was closing in rapidly. The room into which the traveller had been ushered was very sombre ; at the distant end there was the glow of a fire in a vast chimney. On a broad table, set near it, a two-branched candelabrum cast a circle of light which was reflected palely upon the pages of an open book and in blue flickers on what looked like a bundle of steel-blades, by the side of it.

Dark panelling, a ceiling of cross beams and an oaken floor, narrow windows high up in the wall against the blackness of the skies—it was little a couple of candles and the smouldering wood on the hearth could effect against such gloom. Save for the table and a deep armchair by its side, the apartment seemed empty of furniture.

It was so utterly unlike what the new-comer had expected, that he halted just within the threshold, lost for a few seconds in wonder. He had pictured to himself, indeed, scenes strangely different : ante-chambers enlivened by guards and gold-laced officers in waiting ; a splendid reception-room set forth with due brilliancy and coloured warmly to the eye, were it only by old tapestry and faded heraldic pomp.—Could this really be the dwelling-place of so high a

personage as the Castellan of a royal strong-house ?

But he had no time to reach a conclusion. At the sound of the closing door, the occupant of this strict chamber had risen from the depth of the armchair, where possibly sleep had overtaken him in his solitude. The movement, however, was remarkably alert ; so was the gesture with which the candlestick was seized and silently raised sideways at arm's length to bear upon the visitor.

Mr. Farrant took a few brisk steps forward and stood gazing at last upon his unknown relative of the North, as revealed in the fall of light.

Sir William Hope, of Balcomie, was then only fifty-five ; but, sour and solitary, he looked a full decade older. A tall, spare, and very erect figure, plainly clad in a fashion that recalled the last reign but one ; a thin face, once, evidently, handsome enough, now deeply wrinkled ; grey bushy eyebrows, brought to actual meeting by a permanent frown over light-blue eyes, alert and searching eyes—those were the first points that Edward Farrant marked in him who was to be his host in Edinburgh.

With an inclination, happily compound of deference to age and station and affectionate greeting to a kinsman, the young man announced himself.

“ Here I am at last, uncle ! ”

In the cheerless ancient room, the voice rang young, frank, and pleasing. The old gentleman, without speaking, raised his candles a little higher, gazing keenly. Then a flickering smile seemed almost to bring colour upon the greyness of the hard features. . . . The youth had Sir

William's approval ! . . . Yes, in truth, a youth of right bearing : fine poise of head and shoulders, well-balanced hand-gesture, straight-seeking look of the eyes—aye, aye, here was one, as he had heard, well qualified for the wearing of a gentleman's sword !

Sir William placed the chandelier back on the table ; then, opening his arms, received the visitor in a short embrace, saying, in good English if with a broad Scots accent :

“ And welcome here, nephew Edward !—I am happy to see ye.”

II

SIR WILLIAM HOPE, OF BALCOMIE

SOME six weeks before this meeting, Sir William Hope, of Balcomie, castellan of Her Majesty's royal stronghold of Edinburgh, had received from one Andrew Quillett, Writer to the Signet, a request to reveal (under the seal of secrecy, should His Honour deem it necessary) the whereabouts of any living male Farrant of Weyford, in the County of Surrey, England, with reference to an important property left by Elspeth, younger sister to Sir William, who had married into that family. The saturnine baronet only knew of the one Farrant, his nephew, who had, some ten years past, joined his father at the court of the exiled Stuarts: beyond that could afford no immediate information. But the interest which every properly-constituted Scotsman takes in a blood-relative had been awakened in his solitary soul, and he had communicated with a French gentleman friend of his youth, asking for the kind office of inquiries about Mr. Edward Farrant at St. Germain's.

Communications between countries so long at war were of necessity slow. The reply came at last, however, and brought with the desired information, incidentally, a new and very different interest into the reader's life.

“ I think [had concluded the correspondent, in his polished French style] that, if I may presume so to surmise on the strength of your noted attachment (in the days when I was honoured with your company) to the noble Art of Arms and all that appertains thereto, that you are likely to take especial delight in this accomplished young gentleman. Mr. Farrant is not only an admired Rider of the High Horse—an ornament, I may say, of the Royal Manège of Versailles—but he is reputed as the most expert swordsman in the Court. The art of the sword and its courtesies would appear to run in your race. Well do I remember you, my dear friend, in the days of your own happy youth !

“ He has had, as a matter of course, sundry affairs of honour (what young man of mettle has not ?), but he is known invariably to have used his unapproachable dexterity to generous purpose. His grace and handsome temper, in short, equal his skill if they cannot surpass it. Lately he had the honour of playing a bout in the *Orangerie* with Maistre Jean de Brye before the King’s Majesty.”

Now it is not too much to say that, from the moment of the perusal of M. de Nord-Willard’s epistle, the old baronet’s dream, waking and sleeping, had been the expected visit of this paragon of nephews. For, as the courtly Frenchman had recalled, swordsmanship was indeed the ruling passion in the soul of Sir William Hope of Balcomie : it went to the verge of mania. It was an infatuation comparable only to that of Sir Quixote of la Mancha for deeds of knight-errantry.

The bulk of his fortune, which inclined to the

modest side, was spent in the printing of those wonderful treatises for which, truth to say, there was less demand even than for volumes of sermons, and in enticing lovers of a blade, of whatsoever quality or degree, to private practice with him or public contest "at blunts."

The great chamber was always kept empty on the mere chance of a bout, though visitors worthy of his steel were like to be rare birds.

"Your portmantle," quoth Sir William, "is to be left in your chamber. The evening's collops nae doubt will be ready in an hour. Let us talk!—What news bring you, Edward?—Body of me, how you favour my poor sister, lad!"

"News, uncle?" began the youth, and fain would he have said, "the uppermost is that I am hungry as a wolf!" But he dismissed the phrase, with a little laugh to himself, as too jocular. "News—none, I should think, that you will not have received on greater authority. This peace of Utrecht, what a change——"

"Aye, I know—I know," interrupted the old gentleman. There was an absent tone in his voice. "A great change—aye."

"A change that brings no good to many of us—none to me, uncle!" the other went on ruefully. "The King—I mean the Chevalier," catching himself up in deference to his relative's royal office, "the Chevalier, denied now a residence in France, has removed to Lunéville."

"Lunéville—Lunéville," murmured the Governor musingly, "that would be in Lorraine?"

"Yes." The nephew sat down on a corner of the table. "But the court of the Duke of Lorraine," he went on, "is not that of the *Roy*

Soleil . . . a setting sun, sir, though 'twould seem now ! His Highness of Lorraine can scarce maintain a royal train for the—for the Chevalier, his guest. By the Lord, uncle, your summons to a new fortune came as opportunely as fish-haul in Lenten time ! My prospects were perplexing in sooth—I was not of the favoured few bidden follow His Majesty. Now"—the young man's face was all eagerness—"touching this summons in haste——"

Sir William, however, heeded naught of the anxious question. "I have not heard," he said in a dreamy manner, "of any master of note being encouraged by the Dukes of Lorraine. . . . After all, nephew, you've lost but little !"

"Masters ?" Mr. Farrant laughed. "I trust I have seen the last of the race in Dr. Gilchrist, my late Dominie. Lord love you, uncle ! do you forget I have been held a responsible man these——"

"I mean, Edward, masters of fence," gravely rebuked his relative. "From what hath reached my ears touching your achievements, lad, it were worse than waste of time for you to meet—except when in earnest—which God grant may be as seldom as possible—with any but approved masters. Now I, for instance"—Mr. Farrant was lost in amazement, as he saw his kinsman, in whom he had noted more than one venerable attribute, suddenly spring from his chair, stretch and bend his knees and with fantastic gait begin to pace the sombre room—"I myself have investigated the arcana of the sword during a life more than twice the span of yours, nevvvy, and yet I scarce dare think I have mastered all its beautiful possibilities."

As he spoke, the old gentleman doffed his coat, threw it in a corner of the room, and re-

turned within the circle of light, a thin, weird figure in a sleeved vest. Edward Farrant's head had begun to reel.

"But," went on the baronet, checking himself, "let me see your latest approved ward. Off with your coat, lad!"

"Pray, pray, my good uncle," cried the visitor, laughing a little ruefully, "have patience. There's scarce the stomach in me for a bout just now—for a bout worthy of you, sir! And indeed, in this light——"

"Fie, Edward!" replied the elder, with a triumphant gleam of eye. "Weariness?—Light? 'Tis clear to me that, dainty blade though you may be, there are views of sword-play you have not yet considered."

So saying, he strode to a distant corner, where from a cupboard in the panelling there presently issued a familiar sound of clinking and rattling.

"A man," resumed Sir William, returning with a pair of foils, "a man may—I need hardly point it out—have to fight though he hap to be dog-weary. What of it? Let him have a play in his head to outwit mere lustiness. Again, nevvvy, a man may have to fight by uncertain light—nay, in the murk itself. I have fully elucidated the rules of certainty in my chapter: *How your true Swordsman may be fortified against an attack in the Dark*. . . . Come, young sir, a taste of your quality before we take supper!"

The traveller heaved a sigh, as he tossed his coat on to the table. "To sail," quoth he to himself, "two hundred leagues of rough waters and be made thus to pay for bite and sup at the end . . . !" But he took the proffered foil with his best grace.

The announcement of supper by a major-domo put a stop to this converse of steel ; and Edward was surprised to find how, in the interest of what had after all proved a notable contest, he had forgotten both fatigue and hunger. As for Sir William, he was now in a mighty state of glee.

"Nephew Ned," he cried as they sat down in his retiring-room, cheerfully lit and warmed, to a small table bright with napery and silver, "I proclaim thee a true artist ! Zounds, but 'tis a brave wind has blown you here ! A tass of this right aquavit, eh ?—Nevvy, art a paragon, I say !—Now accommodate me with your asshet, good Monsieur Farrant, for some ladlefuls of this *Pôtage Coq-à-poireau*. Aha-ha ! . . . Hast indeed well earned thy supper."

Mr. Farrant was of the same opinion, and fell to the cock-a-leekie, the mutton and the cakes with the appetite of a young hound. Thus agreeably occupied, he managed to listen with some semblance of interest to the old gentleman's continued dissertations on the *Ars Dimicatoria*.

When the cloth was removed, however, the claret placed on the oak, and they were left to themselves, he seized the opportunity of a lull in the monologue to slip in a question anent the real object of his voyage. Taking a parcel of papers from his pocket and clapping it on the table : "Now, uncle," he began, "here are the writings you bade me bring. 'Twould be idle to pretend that I am not anxious to know more of——"

But the elder gentleman cast an indifferent look at the bundle : "Oh—aye," quoth he. "I'm glad you have brought them—the papers—aye. Tush !" he went on querulously, "you

interrupted me, lad. What was I saying? Aye, the arresting point it was—the true inwardness of which excellent invention—mine own——”

“Nay, sir,” broke in the young man firmly, “you had indeed brought your discourse on that matter to a conclusion. If you would cast an eye on these documents, my good uncle——”

It was a look of positive aversion that Sir William now bestowed on the parchments pushed across the table towards him. “I know naught of the trade,” he said pettishly. “Mr. Quillett, the writer, is your man. You shall see him, to-morrow . . . or next day. All in due time, laddie—all in due time. Put them up safe.”

But, even as, vaguely discomfited, Edward stretched out a hand to take back the deeds, the old man suddenly snapped them from his grasp: “Nay, I’ll ha’ the charge of them myself. Youth is a careless time.”

He rose, marched towards an escritoire under the window, and dropped the bundle into a drawer. When he returned to his glass, the cloud of dissatisfaction had passed from his face.

“Safe as the Regalia in the Keep!” he chuckled. “But, nevvie; once more anent this fence in the dark—by feel of steel, in a manner of saying—even as to-night! In the last edition of my *Art of the Broad and Small Sword, rectified and compendised*—it is now in the hands of James Watson the printer, but I have some proof-sheets here. . . .”

The strokes of ten by the Castle clock had boomed solemnly, and still Sir William discoursed. And there is reason to believe the

worthy gentleman would have gone on discoursing till dawn had not he chanced, owing to the accident of a snore from his nephew's parted lips, to discover that the young gentleman was fast asleep. Edward Farrant had indeed, for one hour by help of refreshing calls on the tappet-hen, borne the boredom of polite listening, and for another the tortures of overwhelming drowsiness. But in an unwary moment he had propped his head on his hand : and, almost in the same instant, slumber had overtaken him.

The youth never knew exactly how he had got to his couch that night. He had disjointed recollections, like lantern-flashes in the dark, of his uncle's hand on his shoulder . . . of a reproachful face close to his ; of a "*Tut, tut, nevvie !*" in his ear. Then, without transition, he seemed to be in a nightmare of stone stairs . . . and it was ever up and up, with a voice behind him—" *Natheless, the advantage is not always to him that stands above his opponent, in a stairway, for there are sundry notable instances . . .*" and then he was in bed. Then again—and the words penetrated to his jaded hearing like a menace : "*To-morrow I will show you my perfected device of the arresting point. . . .*"

"The most pressing," said Edward Farrant to himself, as he awoke, brisk and fresh, to as fair a winter's morning as ever broke frostily over Auld Reekie, "is to hie me to yon lawyer Quillett, with my papers."

But, as he sat with his uncle over the cold collops and the small ale, the business proved as difficult of approach as on the night before.

"Papers, Ned ? Ye'll let a man swallow his bite, I trust. The law won't run away from

you, in this town—'tis more like to be running after an honest lad!" The old gentleman interrupted his laughter to stare at a crossed knife and fork on the white cloth before him. "Hey!" he cried in great excitement, "see here, Ned, as pretty an instance of *forte* on *foible* as couldst wish to see—it's in nature. . . ."

His Honour was again fairly launched. The winter sunshine was broad on the oak panelling before they rose from the table. Edward Farrant, dazed as he was, came back to his purpose: "And now, dear uncle, if you will kindly extract the documents——"

"Oh, aye—the documents."

Sir William took the young man by the arm and walked with him to the *escritoire*, blandly enough; but, instead of putting the key in the lock, he remained staring a second at the blue of the skies. "'Tis no morning for documents, nephew," he then said, with great decision. "If you will have it from me, 'tis the morning for Bruntsfield links. Riding—aye, the high horse, laddie. I have a pair of chargers—Blenheim and Ramillies—broken in by myself, the only trained prads in Embro'."

And, on the moment, Mr. Edward Farrant was made acquaint with another hobby of his relative—another legacy of his old Versailles days. A little later, with the keen air in his face, a noble piece of horseflesh between his knees, and the sparkle of the grand cold in his blood, he might have enjoyed himself mightily on the links, had it not been for the curvets and caprioles and the restless varying of *allures* which the pedant in cavalier science insisted upon.

Before the sun set, a crimson ball over the

Pentlands, the young man made another futile attempt, met this time with a snort of scorn.

" You little know the writer folk, if you think you'll find your Mr. Quillett to your hand without warning. Good sakes ! you should have sent to him before *déjeuner*. Nay, youth is a careless time ! I'll even see to it myself in the morning. And what say ye to a crack with the pistols in the courtyard ? "

And into the courtyard Mr. Farrant, stiff with the morning's high-horse caracoling, worn in spirit with the endless dithyrambs on the beauty of arms, had to accompany Sir William, who would stop before a frozen puddle to show him the artfulness of a *passeggiata* to the right combined with a left *incartata* to circumvent the obstacle ; and again before a jutting doorpost to demonstrate with his cane the *point-volant* he esteemed the best.

" I really believe," said the vexed youth to himself that night, " that my uncle is as daft as Nebuchadnezzar . . . ! And that he has sent for me all the way from France for the sole purpose of practising his pranks on my *corpus vile* ! "

And thus day after day went by. Edward Farrant insisted indeed on asserting his own will so far as to encompass the extraction of the documents from the drawer and their due delivery to Mr. Quillett. But, in spite of almost daily meetings thereafter—always accompanied by Sir William—either with that worthy in Colburn's tavern, or with Mr. Counsellor Maunsell in his sky-perched rooms in Pilkington's land, the business seemed little more advanced. And,

meanwhile, interminable bouts and dissertations of fencing, learned criticisms of *haute-école* riding, consumed the hours till mere existence became terrible to the gay-hearted youth—and the lust of departure a frenzy.

On the tenth day Providence intervened. The excellent Sir William had actually business to attend to in connection with his office : a matter of such rare occurrence as to produce both surprise and annoyance in the Governor. He suggested a postponement of the legal rendezvous that day. But Edward, struck by a glint of cunning in the old man's eye, slipped from his presence with a vague excuse and went straight in search of the lawyer.

"My dear young sir," said Mr. Quillett, after some hemming and hawing, "since you press me for a statement, I am obligated to admit that every matter requiring personal attendance was, of a truth, settled on the first day. There is naught now that cannot be managed by procuration."

"Say you so?" cried his client, divided between wrath and joy. "Then, my uncle. . . ."

"Oh, Sir William—aye, Sir William. Hech, he's loth enough to part with ye, Mr. Farrant. . . ! Natheless," continued the writer, between two sniffs at "the sneeshing," "if ye'll no give me away with His Honour, young gentleman, I canna but say that 'twould be weel if ye thocht, without delay, of pushing, noo, your rights with the southron lawyers."

Sir William took the news of his precious relative's determination, to set forth on the very morrow, with a frown so dark that any less high-spirited youth might have felt daunted. But Mr. Farrant, the colour rising in his face, pro-

ceeded with an increase of firmness : “ I have made all arrangements, sir. I have already selected my horse at the posting-master’s.”

The men looked at each other for a while without further words. Then the Governor heaved a sigh. The fierce, eager old face changed ; grew troubled, pathetic : “ ’Tis well, nephew,” he said confusedly. “ I understand—meaning I understand your anxiety . . . I shall accompany you as far as Fisherrow . . . nay, as far as Leven Hall. I shall miss thee, Ned. But mark me,” he went on, his voice steadying itself, “ post me no posting-masters ! Shalt have Blenheim to carry thee . . . carry thee away. I love your hand on Blenheim’s bit. Nay, I insist, you shall. No one here, save me, can sit the clever prad like thyself.—Zounds, but I shall miss thee, lad ! ”

He smiled ; stretched out a finger and touched his nephew’s hand. Both smile and finger were a little tremulous.

“ Oh, sir——” cried the young man, and could find not a word more either of gratitude or excuse.

But, for once, the pair were in true sympathy ; and Edward Farrant scarce knew whether he were relieved or sorry when the old enthusiast conducted the converse, that last night, with an obvious effort to keep all reference to sword-play within bounds of reason.

The parting took place next day on the southern outskirts of Leven Hall. They had partaken of a crust and a nooning cup, in the pale winter sunshine at the door of the ale-house. They now embraced—in silence, for there was, in the elder man, a choking emotion

on which the younger, half ashamed of his eagerness for flight, did not care to intrude.

When Mr. Farrant was in the saddle once more, Sir William took down from his own a slender sheath and cleared his throat. "Nephew Edward," he said with solemnity, "never again, maybe, shall I feel thy blade against mine. . . . Art a wondrous swordsman, nephew. Natheless, hearkee : in thy life—and may it be long ! —ye'll be meeting with Ignorants who, considering that they can receive no prejudice by being hit with softly-buttoned foils, will rush and ramble on thee, and charge in despite of all rules of art. Aye, taking no heed of thy masterful stop-thrusts, they will venture that with thee, at blunts, which they would never dare to risk at sharps. And thus they may, perchance, in their own overweening conceit and in the eyes of Ignorants like themselves, appear to secure a victory over thee. This were monstrous, lad ! Never to be tolerated. Therefore I pray thee, Edward, if ever thou playest for a wager, use these." As he spoke, the Governor busied himself in securing the parcel on Blenheim's saddle-bow. "Foils with my arresting point. Keep them precious : shalt not find another pair anywhere. My own device, as thou knowest. A quarter of an inch of sharp steel beyond the button, aha ! Aye, these in hand, let your Ignorant ramble his bellyful ! . . . And so, farewell ! God bless thee !"

He mounted, gave his hat a fine flourish, made his correct *demi-volte*, and, at a stately pace, started for his solitary home. Yet, suddenly was his back bowed, like that of a man aged and feeble.

Mr. Farrant, thus set on his return journey,

cast a look of old grudge over his left shoulder at the slate-coloured sea, on the few grey-sailed vessels heaving southward in a shrewish wind—and hugged with delight the thought of a steady road before him, a fine nag between his knees.

As for Edinburgh Castle, rising in the dim north, clean behind him, he would not bestow a parting glance on it, for the sheer weariness of the memory. A moment, indeed, the impulse crossed his mind to fling into the first deep water on his way the parcel with which he had been burdened ; but he took shame on himself for the thought, and, pushing forward at a trot, sent an affectionate if jubilant speeding after the kindly tyrant who had so tormented him.

Before very long he had cause to congratulate himself on not having yielded to the temptation.

III

AN AMATEUR TOBYMAN

THE adventure happened, the third day, on the Great North Road. Mr. Farrant, travelling by easy stages, as much for his own comfort as for love of Blenheim, had left Berwick in the morning and designed to lie at Alnwick. He was nearing Bridgemills, some eight miles south of the Border. The sun, half-way down on its December course, cast faint shadows across the road. As he approached a certain steep fall of ground partly hidden by a clump of bare-branched trees, there came on the wing of the westerly wind the report of a shot, followed by rumours of hoofs, grinding wheels and shouting voices. Then out cracked another shot.

He pushed forward instantly at a swinging trot, drawing, as he went, one of Uncle William's holster-pistols. But the scene which now came into view might well have brought caution to his pace. It was that of a travelling coach half-overturned in a shallow ditch, the nearside horse apparently dead on the ground, the other plunging and kicking. Some twenty yards beyond, another horse lay struggling, and a man of slight figure was in the act of picking himself up and making for flight. Midway between

stood a gentleman of decidedly stout build : with right hand uplifted he pointed a pistol at the dismounted cavalier ; his left hand, drooping by his side, held its still smoking companion. At the sound of horse's hoofs behind him, this personage wheeled round sharply : " Another of them, by the Lord ! . . . Stand, ho, there ! " he shouted, and now levelled his weapon against the new-comer.

Mr. Farrant reined in, replaced his pistol and raised his hat with a grace. " Hold your hand, sir ! " he called out cheerily. " A true man—no rumpad, I do assure you ! "

The stout gentleman eyed him narrowly for a moment ; then wheeling again, violently gesticulated in the direction of the fugitive now cutting across the fields with such speed as he could muster : " In the Queen's name ! . . . Secure the tobyman, if be you are true man, sir," he panted. " My running days are over ! "

The last words fell on empty air : Mr. Farrant was already in pursuit. As he gained on the runner, the latter halted and faced round. A sinister figure in his crape mask, he covered his pursuer deliberately ; then fired. Here, no doubt, " high-horse " education saved the noble Blenheim's life. A traversing curvet to the right, in exact time . . . and the ball passed clear by his left. The masked man fell to tugging at his sword-hilt with frantic effort ; but, bent in the scabbard by his fall, the blade resisted. He stood weaponless.

Edward Farrant gripped him by the collar and forced him at a trot back towards the coach, near which the outline of the portly traveller stood grimly against the grey sky.

" In the name of heaven . . . ! " groaned

the prisoner, " stay a moment, sir—oh, sir, but a moment !—I am a gentleman."

" Too late, my gentleman, to cry pax ! " retorted Farrant, angered out of his usual good-nature by the narrow escape of the horse he had already learned to love.—" Here is your man, sir," he cried. " What's to be done with him ? "

" Done ?—Why, to the lock-up to-night, and to-morrow Berwick jail."

The highwayman, panting and exhausted by his forced run, stood helpless in the rider's grasp : the coachman now approached and, suddenly, vindictively, from behind secured his elbows with a buckled strap. His master watched the tricing process with approval ; then, turning to the captor, said roundly : " You will, I trust, require no apologies from me, young sir—there was, you must concede, scarce time for reflection just now ! But I owe you my thanks. I am Squire Harnwell, of Wisplands, close by. And I would request, Mr.—— ? "

" Mr. Farrant . . . of Weyford Chase, in Surrey," answered the other diplomatically, since St. Germain's was not a name to cast carelessly about.

" Well then, Mr. Farrant, as a magistrate, I must request your declaration in this matter. I pray you will accept of Wisplands' hospitality to-night. Yes ? Why then, I am happy. By the same token, I expect some neighbours. Men who can face a bottle, sir. Aha ! So. 'Tis agreed."

Down the road the highwayman's horse was snorting with agony, struggling in vain efforts to rise.

" Here's the barker, Giles ! " called the squire

to his servant. "Go put the nag out of his trouble—'twas no fault of his if he bore a ruffian. But, harkee, bring in the saddle!"

Mr. Farrant's heart warmed to his road-acquaintance for this gruff mercifulness.

"And now, rascal," the squire went on, tearing off the crape that hid the prisoner's face, "let's have a squint at your phiz.—Split me!" He paused a second, staring. "Zounds, my lad," he went on, disconcerted, "art strangely young for the trade!" Then, almost reluctantly, came the conclusion: "Well, my cockerel, hast selected thine own midden—shalt have to abide by it. In with thee!"

Of a truth, the head revealed by the removal of the mask was that of a mere lad, scarce past his teens; and though deathly pale, it was not only markedly handsome, but stamped with unmistakable breeding. The prisoner turned fierce, despairing eyes from the man who had captured him to the man who would on the morrow send him to his death-trial. He opened his mouth to speak, but seemed to think better of it; and in silence he entered the coach, pushed in, not unkindly, by the magistrate.

A pang of regret struck Edward Farrant. "In the name of heaven! . . ." the youth had pleaded—and in a voice which might have carried conviction. "Indeed . . . I am a gentleman!" In a pensive mood the rider started alongside the carriage and, at the slow pace necessitated by its crippled condition, they proceeded in silence until the grey courtyard of the Hall closed about them.

"Here you, Tam, and you, Will," the squire called to a couple of stablemen who were pressing forward, all agog, "you can stare later, and hear

all about it from Giles ! Take this fellow to the cell. Aye, easy ! No bullying, lads ! ” Then, turning to his guest : “ To-morrow,” he went on, “ will serve for the declaration, Mr. Farrant. I’m as hungry as a pike. Ah, here comes my niece.—Why, Alice, ’tis a good thing old nuncle rode in your stead to-day, after all ! You that were so wrath with sister Rachel for keeping you in the stillroom . . . ! We’ve nabbed a highwayman !—Zooks, what’s the matter, now, with the lass ? ”

Farrant—a judge of such points—received a swift first impression of the comeliness of the girl who had run out to the porch. Her auburn hair shone gloriously even in the gathering dusk ; and so did dark eyes above the rich carmine of her cheeks. But, even as he looked, this glow faded. He perceived she was battling with emotion. She became ashy pale. She cast a wild look after the retreating figure of the prisoner, and, for a moment, sought the support of the lintel. But she stiffened herself, and without a word offered her forehead to her uncle’s kiss.

“ There, girl,” he said, chuckling, “ never be in such a taking ! We might, no doubt, have come to harm—but, you see, are all sound, I and old Giles—and this gentleman. Mr. Farrant, my dear. He lies here to-night. ’Twas he did the taking of the miscreant.”

But, over the shoulder of her kindly, unconscious uncle, she flung a glance of such fierce reproach at Mr. Farrant that he halted in his courteous advance.

“ Oho ! ” thought he. “ Sits the wind in that quarter ? ” And his misgivings deepened uncomfortably.

Before an hour had elapsed, Edward Farrant found himself seated at the squire's board, in company with half-a-dozen neighbouring gentlemen—all of the noisy, ruddy, sporting, country kind. The only ladies present were the squire's sister, Miss Rachel, and his niece, Miss Fenwick—the former an elderly spinster of determined mien, who evidently presided over the household.

The girl's face was set into a kind of mask ; but she could not control her colour, which still fluctuated with the varied pulsings of an anxious heart. Beside her was placed one whom the squire affectionately addressed as Nephew Archie: a sturdy youth who might have passed for good-looking but for the stupid, rather gross expression that sat on his features. It presently transpired that this gentleman was the betrothed of Miss Fenwick ; and that the feast had been convened to celebrate approaching nuptials.

" Aye, neighbours, 'twill be a great day ! " the squire repeated in different keys of jubilation. " An old affair, Mr. Farrant. Settled, it may be said, when the lass here was a toddler and her lad there a roaring schoolboy. Aye, Archie and Alice—so it was ! And as neat a joining of estates—Wolfridge and Wisplands—as heart would wish."

Farrant looked from the girl, wrapped in icy composure, to the amorous, high-coloured youth beside her, and marvelled that none beside himself should fail to see how little the heart had to say in the matter on the maid's part. " No doubt," he thought, " these country dullards see naught in the young lady's demeanour but a becoming excess of virginal reserve—yet, how is it possible not to read the meaning of the flame that even now leaps from her eye as the

betrothed leans familiarly over her ! Good Gad ! ” cried Edward Farrant to himself, “ why, she sickens at the very touch of him ! ” .

Neither lady spoke beyond an occasional monosyllable. But the squire made up for all deficiencies. The episode of the tobyman afforded a theme likely to entertain his guests. “ By the living jingo,” quoth he, “ ’twas but a greenhorn for such a trade ! I, truth to say, had dropped to sleep . . . ’twas the shot woke me, and the jolt when the old mare fell. Lard ! if he’d only clapped the muzzle to my costard then, he’d have had his own way. . . . There was I, neighbours, fumbling under the seat for the barkers. Instead of that, the booby stands staring as though his eyeballs would drop through the holes in his mask. And, the moment I up with my barrel, he drops me a kind of groan and off with him the way he had come. . . . At this, out rolls I ! My fellow already three lengths ahead . . . but I brought his nag down, right enough. . . . I’d have let the rascal go ; but, split me, he had shot my poor Moggie ! . . . Hey, Mr. Farrant, ’twas then you came prancing in—’twas the Lord’s mercy I didn’t bring down that fine young gentleman too ! Your health, sir !—Hugh, a glass of ale to Mr. Farrant.”

And then all the gentlemen present begged to click glasses with the stranger who had so opportunely come to the squire’s aid and nabbed the highwayman. Even as Edward bent, smiling, to the courtesy, he caught the young lady’s eye of fire on him. So full of hatred was it, that the smile froze on his lips.

Almost immediately afterwards she withdrew with her aunt ; and the gentlemen were left to their wine for the night.

In the midst, now, of rousing conviviality, Mr. Farrant's mind was strangely ill at ease. He fell from one fit of abstraction into another and was perpetually rallied by his host for neglecting his glass. The squire, indeed, had developed a monstrous liking for his fortuitous guest, which, as the wine flowed, waxed to the pitch of enthusiasm.

"Come," he cried, "you gentlemen of Surrey—Weyford in Surrey, did you say?—don't seem to face the mouth of a bottle as boldly as that of a pistol! By the Lord, I never saw anything like the way you gave our man's shot the slip! . . . Eh, eh, in the very nick! Come, a bumper to your good luck! You ride a fine nag, sir. And, by the same token, Giles brought in, with your valise, an odd packet—rattled—couldn't make it out."

"Oh—that? A case of foils," said Farrant lightly.

"Foils! Gad, odd things to carry about. But, now, I'll wager you'll be as neat with the blade as in the saddle. Never say you're not!"

"Why—of a truth, I have handled a blade. . . . But, indeed——" Edward Farrant paused on the weary thought: was he never to get away from the fencing!

"Now, I, sir," the squire went on, "have been much in love, in my day, with cudgel-play. . . . The date is out now. . . ! But your pinking, 'twould not be my game. Archibald there (pass the bottle, Archie), Archibald was in London once, to learn the graces, aha! Eh, Archie?—Gad, nephew, here's your chance to rub rust off. I'd love to see you pass on him, sir. To-morrow, eh, in the barn? Never say nay, Mr. Farrant!"

“ Alas, sir, to-morrow I must travel, at earliest hour : my stages are counted. And, besides,” he hastened to add, “ the foils I carry are scarce the kind that Mr. Haseltine would care to use, as you may see, if you will send for them.”

IV

“ EXPERIMENTUM IN CORPORE VILI ”

THE sheath was brought in. The menacing appearance of Sir William's implements, as they were passed down the table, excited much interest ; but, as their owner had surmised, little desire to put them personally to the test. With some humour Mr. Farrant explained their inventor's views on the subject. “ It is patent,” he concluded, “ that my good uncle's device is not fit for a friendly set-to. . . . But he had a prodigious belief in my skill——”

“ And, why, Mr. Farrant, sir, with reason! Now, I'll go bail,” interrupted his host boisterously, “ 'twould take a rare fellow to place a hit on your vest! Frizzle me, sir, when I saw you wheel on that runaway rascal . . . that shot my Moggie . . . wi'out a why or a what out of you, thinks I: 'Tis as nipping a lad. . . ! Gadzooks!” cried the squire, “ I'd give ten pounds, that I would, ten pounds this minute, to see you at it!” He thumped the table, caught up one of Sir William's special foils and balanced it. “ Says you: no gentleman here would like a bout with these—but you'd be ready enough, I'll warrant! Oh, oh! Neighbours, neighbours, are none of you for the sport of it to-night?”

There was a blank silence round the board.

Each man eyed the other, as who would say, “Have at it, lad!” But never a one rose at the squire’s bait.

Mr. Farrant, on his side, was seeking in his mind for a disclaimer which should combine modesty on his own account with a courteous understanding for the backwardness of his fellow guests. All at once an idea so luminous and pregnant with possibilities shot through his brain, that, with the readiness his host had admired, he leaped to execute it. Leaped, indeed, as quickly with body as with wit—for he was out of his chair in a second, had snatched the second foil and was cutting the air with as cunning and vicious a threat as would have satisfied Sir William himself.

All now stared at him. It seemed truly as if the whole man had changed.

“And why, now,” he exclaimed, “none shall say that Ned Farrant is backward at the wager!”

He fell on a truculent guard—which, at this stage of the potations, was greeted with delight—and, with unerring precision, drove the arresting point into the very centre of a design in the panel, where it left a mark as deep as that of a withdrawn nail. Then, looking round:

“’Pon my soul, Mr. Harnwell, now that I have tasted of the poise of this foil, I too would give a trifle to practise on something more responsive than oak—some *corpus vile*, as my uncle would have said.” He paused, with a smile, testing on his forefinger the goad that projected its bodkin point beyond the foil. Then, as though a brilliant thought had just struck him—“By Gad! . . . that highwaywan of yours, squire! When you come to think of it—but for me, he would have escaped. Now . . . what if I

claimed him as captive to my own bow and spear, in a manner of speaking?" Edward Farrant's brain was clear as crystal: but he now affected a look of vinous elevation that suited the company well enough. "What says the squire?" he went on. "Shall we have sport with the rascal? Come, Mr. Justice, the what-call-ye-them—the declarations are not made yet: let's offer him the key of the fields an he show a good fight! . . . Gad, he'll fight, say I!—Was he not ready to draw his poker on me? . . . only it stuck! Why, e'en a rat will bite for his life. 'Twill be a rare sight. Why, damme, sir"—here he made a phenomenal long pass which aroused fresh enthusiasm—"one proper pink on my chest to my round dozen on his . . . or to the hangman with him! Yes—I'll back myself to a round dozen drills in our tobyman's skin! Let's have the miscreant out, I say!"

Without giving his host time for hesitation about a proposal which, in sooth, jumped well enough with the latter's inclination, the young man went on, even brisker: "Now send for the prisoner!"

The shout raised at this by the jovial toppers rang through the old house. Young Archibald, eyes alight with greed for the gory show, ran officiously out of the room, calling as he went on the household for the key of the cell. Edward Farrant rattled on with the first nonsense that came to his tongue, not to allow the bewildered and yielding magistrate time to draw back.

Suddenly he paused. He had heard a sound in the minstrels' gallery at the end of the room; the swinging of a softly-opened door, the rustle of a gown. He glanced up, and understood. "We shall want more room," he cried, as on a

fresh thought. “Why, simple! This table over there, right under the gallery. . . ! Lend a hand, gentleman . . . and all the chairs on the table—middle one for His Honour! Zooks! ’twill be as good as a bench of the quorum!”

Thus rollicking, he drove the company off before him and forced his laughing host and his fellow guests into the judicial seats. Then, with sudden gravity, he began to divest himself bare down to his waist.

Again the rafters rang to acclamations when Miss Fenwick’s official bridegroom-elect flung open the dining-room door and, with a great show of force towards a desperate ruffian, dragged the prisoner in by the collar.

The unfortunate highwayman stood bewildered and dazed by the lights; and Farrant, as he caught the sound of the sobbing sigh above him in the gallery, thrust himself once more to the front, crying: “Gentlemen, I have the management of this.”

So saying, he pushed Mr. Haseltine aside with a thrust of his bare shoulder, which, rough as it was, the latter was too tipsy to resent.

“Up to your seat, sir!—And now you, master tobyman.” He paused, and his bright eyes softened as they fell upon the youth’s marble-white countenance. “Look me in the eyes, sir!”

The other lifted his head and, as he looked, the exhausted pallor of his countenance was dyed with an angry scarlet. His eyes—bright blue they were—flashed. But Farrant forestalled the indignant protest: “On my first acquaintance with you, you were running. . . . But I have wagered that, for all that, you have mettle in you and can stand your ground. And, the

long and the short of it is : will you play me for your life with a pointed button ? ”

He caught up the foil ; and, once more remembering his rôle of slight inebriation, leaned close over the captive as he held out the blade for inspection, and whispered rapidly : “ Up with your heart, man ! ’Tis the best I can do for you ! ” Then springing back with an exaggerated laugh, “ A bumper each,” he cried, “ to stir up the devil in us ! ”

The amateur highwayman swallowed the proffered wine readily enough, and Farrant noted with satisfaction a kindling of his opponent’s whole being that promised a better contest than he had dared to hope.

“ Now off with vest and shirt,” he cried—“ it’s to the buff, my man.—And witness, all present, I challenge this gentleman . . . of the road, to a bout of twelve hits. And I have,” here he raised his voice, “ I have His Honour’s word—the word of Squire Harnwell of Wisplands, gentlemen—that if he so much as hits me once to my twelve, he goes a free man from that moment ! ” He fell back and twirled the foil jubilantly. “ No disclaimers with nunky’s tool ! ” he laughed. “ Each hit marked . . . in red letter ! ”

Intent on the gladiatorial sport, none of the company noticed the swift glance Farrant cast up at the gallery. But, as he balanced himself in fine preliminary poise, he had to harden his heart to the task. For the vision of the girl’s blanched face, with the bitten lips and the eyes dark with fear, filled him with ruth for the innocent pair who had thus bungled over their love-story. “ Gad—but I must ! ” he thought. “ If I seem to let her pretty lad off too easily, the

game's up.” And stamping his call, he cried out :

“ Come on, sir—and God preserve our eyes ! ”

Those of the gentlemen who were familiar with the public stage-fight felt themselves more agreeably stirred than ever at these consecrated words.

From the lad's first wild attack, Farrant knew him more completely at his mercy than he had ever anticipated. The twelve hits of the wager might have been dropped in as many consecutive passes on the white chest helplessly exposed to his cool experience. Not in his most weary bouts, up in Edinburgh Castle, had his fencer's ingenuity been so severely strained—if in vastly different fashion.

How Ned Farrant fiercely attacked, yet spared ; how desperately he advanced and how noisily, if uselessly, he clashed ; how he crept, cat-like, as if looking for openings all but too apparent ; how he shouted French jargon of fence and beat calls with thundering soles—was enough to have misled even less tipsy spectators. Squire Harnwell and his company bellowed applause and encouragement, which grew delirious each time their champion's prowess was proved by the promised red letter.

In spite of all his cunning in maintaining the semblance of a real fight, Mr. Farrant was as immune as ever, and there were nine gory rivulets on his opponent's body. His heart began to sicken. There was, imminent, the danger of seeing the lad drop, vanquished after all, in his exhaustion and bewilderment. And he desperately resolved that the time had come to put an end to the grim farce.

If Sir William Hope, of Balcomie, could have

seen his paragon nephew absolutely spit himself upon the choice instrument devised for the honour of True Art in fence, the shock would doubtless have sent that worthy gentleman into a fit.

But there was no denying that Mr. Farrant had been pinked—and that before he had achieved his twelfth hit! The arresting point had ripped him from the right breast to the left arm-pit. And so bloody an appearance did he present when, with inimitable travesty of amazement and wrath, he turned upon the spectators, that their enthusiasm instantly veered to the side of the conqueror.

“Yoick! Tobyman’s saved his brush!” hiccoughed a fox-hunter.

“By thunder!” cried another excited voice. “Tobyman’s drawn as much blood by that single ripping as all his own nine put together!”

“’Twas all a waiting game, neighbours,” said Squire Harnwell in the judicial tones of the initiate. “From the beginning I saw the rascal was reserving himself.”

And no one, except Farrant, heard the sound of low sobs from the gallery, or knew the meaning of that rushing whisper of silk, followed by the fall of a flung-back door.

Between dawn and sunrise, Edward Farrant and the unsuccessful highwayman started quietly together from the door of the house that had witnessed such exceptional sport, and where the whole jovial company now lay peacefully enough snoring.

True Christmastide weather it was, with sky opal-tinted and earth hard as iron. Faint mists lingered here and there in the hollows of the park

and among the tree-tops—“like bridal veils,” thought the young lover, as he swayed dreamily, weak and still fevered by his troubled experiences, to Blenheim’s perfect pace. Mr. Farrant had peremptorily bidden him mount, and he himself walked contentedly alongside: save for the burning of that self-inflicted tearing, he was in cheerful fettle.

At the bend of the road, the hooded figure of Miss Fenwick glided out from under a thicket. Farrant, in his most masterful manner, swung her upon the valise arranged pillion-wise behind the rider. “You can clasp each other on Blenheim’s back, children,” he said, laughing now. “Aye, and to heart’s content, for ’tis eight good miles to Berwick.”

He had set his own heart on seeing these two, whom he had well-nigh tragically separated, in safety together over the border.

They started gaily. And it was well that, wounded as he was, his own lusty constitution enabled him to face the journey on foot without misgiving.

Gaily still, they breakfasted together at Berwick. And, from the inn door, Mr. Farrant, with great satisfaction, watched the post-chaise roll away with the happy fugitives towards Lamberton Bar.

“’Twas a good thought of mine,” he said to himself, as he took his stirrup-cup, “to send them on with my greetings to nunky! That chest of his, now, will be the best letter of introduction ever man had to His Honour’s favour. . . . So he but follows my advice, and lets the old gentleman count the marks, the lad will never want protector in Edinburgh!”

He turned Blenheim's head once more southward, and started back in leisurely fashion upon the familiar road.

" Well, I for one," he thought gaily, " will never laugh at my own revered relative's whimsies again. Hath not Blenheim, with the *haute-école*, saved my life ; and have I not joined as pretty a pair of lovers as ever kissed, with the help of the old gentleman's arresting point ? "

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